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**Searching and rescuing selves  
an ethnographic study of volunteer identities**

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# **Searching and rescuing selves: An ethnographic study of volunteer identities**

**Sarah-Louise Weller**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

School of Management

March 2017

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## **Abstract**

This ethnographic study explores the subjectively construed discursive identities of individuals in a third sector voluntary organization (QuakeRescue). The focus of the research is 'identity' with the 'identity work' of volunteers a key concept. The thesis aims to investigate how individuals articulate their 'volunteer' identities through narrative and the multiple and intersecting discourses they draw upon.

The study is framed within a qualitative, interpretivist, inductive framework and employs a social constructivist lens. The thesis draws on literature in the fields of identity and discourse, including identity work, narrative and power. Data was co-created through 48 semi-structured interviews in a single case study, augmented by informal observations and a reflective journal. Documentary sources, including website data, were also collected and subjected to analysis. The ethnographic account tells how search and rescue volunteers in QuakeRescue constructed a 'volunteer' identity through discourse, the ways in which that identity was sustained, and the factors that presented challenges and tensions in enacting the voluntary work. The data presented were prepared through an interpretative thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and a reflexive commentary of the study is provided through vignettes of my experiences. The discussion contains three readings interpreting the data from a volunteering, identity and ethnographic perspective.

The primary contribution is in developing the thesis that in volunteering to train to rescue others, individuals and particularly those who never actually deploy, are engaged in a search for meaning and processes of rescuing themselves. A secondary contribution is in providing a distinctive in-depth case study of the identities of voluntary workers who undertake risky and dangerous activities. Thirdly, the thesis demonstrates some of the conflicts inherent in ethnographic fieldwork, including some of the practical and methodological challenges, as well as the identity work that emerged in response to these conflicts.

## **List of abbreviations**

USAR	Urban search and rescue
SAR	Search and rescue(r)
IRT	International response team
CRT	Community resilience team
BOO	Base of operations
SWAH	Safe working at heights
UAV	Unmanned aerial vehicle

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis provides an ethnographic account of a third sector organization and its volunteer members. The work is structured within an interpretive, inductive framework and explores how individuals subjectively construe themselves as search and rescue volunteers through discourse. The thesis adds to the organizational studies and volunteering literatures by providing a distinctive in-depth case study, filling a dearth of empirical data in these domains. My unique contribution to knowledge is in developing the thesis that in joining this organization to save others, the volunteers were engaged in a search for meaning and attempting to rescue themselves.

Organizational studies literature has underplayed the working relationships of the unpaid voluntary 'employee'. Although voluntary work takes place formally within organizations, the identities of volunteers is an under-researched area even though the 'establishment of a volunteer role identity has been proposed as the proximal cause of sustained volunteering' (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Penner, 2002). In fact, there are concerns that the charity sector is being ignored by the academic community in terms of conducting research with employees (Nickson, Warhurst, Dutton, & Hurrell, 2008). Existing studies in the voluntary sector literature lack sociological focus, are mainly normative and quantitatively based, with a psychological dependent variable approach to volunteering (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Kim, Kim, & Odio, 2010; Miles, Sullivan, & Kuo, 1998). Furthermore, little has been written about voluntary workers who undertake risky and dangerous activity and even less about the identities and identity work of such people.

Within organization studies, much theorization and empirical research has considered the concept of identity work in relation to positive and negative identities (Breakwell, 1986; Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010), coherence and fragmentation (Beech, 2008; Ybema et al., 2009), structure and agency (Howard, 2000; Jenkins, 1996), stability and fluidity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Collinson, 2003) as well as authenticity (Trilling, 1972). These studies have focused on the strategies and tactics of identity work of individuals in distinct organizations across a wide range of occupations including accountants (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998), paratroopers (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009), professional rugby players (Coupland, 2015), nurses (Currie, Finn, & Martin, 2010) and priests (Kreiner, Hollensbe, &

Sheep, 2006). Whilst conventional workers have been shown to 'accept, deny, react, reshape, rethink, acquiesce, rebel, conform, define and redefine' their identities (Kunda, 1992, p. 21) existing studies have thus far failed to develop an appreciation of how identity work processes are influenced by dominant discourses and how these are linked to organizational practices (Brown, 2015). What is unclear, is how different organizational settings affect individual identities and identity work and how these findings translate to the third sector and voluntary workers, as Coupland and Brown (2012, p. 3) argue '...identities need to be studied on location (in context) so that identity practices and processes become more visible in terms of what they enable or constrain within the practices and processes of organizing...'. Therefore, this study contributes to both the organization studies and volunteering literatures with an empirical study set within a third sector organization and by exploring the identity work of volunteers.

The volunteer sector is distinctive from conventional work organizations in part because the power dynamics are different, due to the lack of traditional hierarchical controls since members are not managed through the usual methods of pay, bonuses, and promotion. In general, there is no formal contractual agreement through which voluntary members may be disciplined or their employment terminated. In addition, volunteers are different from conventional workers, who may lack choice in their career paths or may be constrained by grading structures, pay and remuneration packages. By contrast, it is generally held that volunteers have freedom to choose their level of participation, may resist without fear of serious reprisal, or exit the organization without disadvantage to their normal occupation, career and financial status.

The case organization, QuakeRescue, is a voluntary humanitarian charity that responds to natural disasters both internationally and within the UK. Based in Wiltshire, QuakeRescue headquarters co-ordinates the activities of three distinct teams of volunteers; an International Response Team (IRT) who deploy worldwide to natural and man-made disasters; two Community Resilience Teams (CRT) who respond to flooding and other extreme weather conditions in the UK; and a Canine Search Team who are able to assist in the location of casualties and missing persons both internationally and within the UK. Deployments to disasters often involve operating in areas where normal order and public services no longer exist, which requires an ability to adapt in order to overcome difficulties, not only when extricating casualties, but in collaborating with a wide variety of organizations,

negotiating access, obtaining scarce resources as well as adjusting to local cultural customs and procedures. The dynamic nature of relationship building, working alongside paid expert rescue services and establishing credibility as competent professionals may require considerable identity work by individuals and the team as well as a level of commitment that differs from most other organizations.

QuakeRescue volunteers carry out a very specific type of voluntary work that few will have previously experienced, which for the IRT, requires the completion of two years of rigorous and demanding training in order to be competent for operational deployment. This necessitates considerable discipline, commitment and personal resilience, which in turn may involve identity work for individuals in establishing themselves as a proficient team member and part of a credible international rescue organization. A distinctive aspect of this volunteering activity is the planned-unplanned aspect of the work. Much of the literature is focused on voluntary activity 'donated' by the volunteer in specified segments of time that are largely, although not exclusively, convenient for the donor. In QuakeRescue, the volunteer agrees and commits to a specific type of voluntary work, but s/he does not know when they will be called on to provide this contribution, potentially 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Another distinguishing feature of this case study is the risk-taking element of the voluntary work that is unusual for most forms of volunteering (exceptionally RNLI, mountain and cave rescue). There is a lack of previous research around the implications risk-taking has for identity work and the discursive resources employed by individuals as they author these particular volunteer identities.

The volunteer identity adds yet another layer of complexity and identity work for QuakeRescue members, as they negotiate their volunteer identity alongside multiple, competing, co-existing identities as employee, parent, husband, wife etc. My research aims to increase knowledge and deepen the ways in which academics understand and write about the 'voluntary worker'. Such a 'widening of work's conceptual boundaries is crucial if the complexity of people's working lives, and the relationships between different forms of work and between work and social identity, are to be explored and understood' (Taylor, 2004, p. 31).

This thesis seeks to explore the subjectively construed discursive identities of volunteers and is "an interpretive study in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1973). An interpretative framework highlights 'nuances of meaning' and is sensitive to the use of language (Brown, 2004), allowing the researcher to engage with people in order

to discover and comprehend 'the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and conveyed in everyday life' (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 215). The purpose of interpretive research is to enrich human discourse (Geertz, 1973) by generating understanding rather than by accumulating knowledge (Bryman, 2008). For interpretive researchers, the literature review is a means of gaining an overview of the topic area they aim to understand through their research and, as a result may appear wide-ranging in scope. Indeed, the literature review has been drawn from a vast volume of identity studies, some of which are not from an interpretivist perspective. That said, I am not drawing on other perspectives as a guiding framework for my study.

An interpretive approach assumes that reality is socially constructed and that discourses play a fundamental part in that process (Heracleous, 2004) as 'the things that make up the social world – including our very identities - appear out of discourse...without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand social reality, our experiences, or ourselves' (Hardy & Phillips, 2002, p. 2). My focus is on subjective identities construed through discourse and other symbolic means. My search for meaning does not simply look for keywords and direct references in the texts but implicit and explicit references. Rather, my search for the discursive construction of volunteer identities is 'guided by shared meaning rather than lexical comparability' (Willig, 2013, p. 116) and as such it is the participants perspectives, their meanings and their multiple, subjective views (Schensul, 1999) as well as my own interpretation of local discourses that are explored.

The selection of an ethnographic approach was made with the intention of achieving 'thick description' rather than 'quick description' and avoiding research by a series of 'flying visits' (Bate, 1997). This approach enabled multiple methods of data collection and I completed semi-structured interviews, made observational field notes and kept a reflective journal. I critically analysed and reviewed the data, and applied theories through an iterative process of moving between the data and the theory. I also developed nine vignettes with the aim of sharing my experiences of the research as well as providing 'critical, ironic insights' (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 29) and a source of perceptive analysis for the benefit of the reader (Mykhalovskiy, 1996). In summary, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of the

construction and development of volunteer identities by providing an in-depth case study of the under-explored context of search and rescue (SAR) volunteers.

## **1.2 Research questions**

The research questions stemmed from my theoretical concerns and a desire to be open-minded so as to allow the direction of the research to be guided by the findings as they appeared during the course of the study. My aim was to gain a complex and detailed understanding of identity processes and this could only be established by talking to volunteers and allowing them to speak 'unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature' (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). The exploratory nature of this study necessitated an emergent and evolving, rather than tightly prefigured design (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Therefore, the research questions were indicative and formulated to provide direction to the study:

- What discourses are central to the construction of a 'volunteer identity'?
- How is the volunteer identity sustained? What factors present challenges and tensions in enacting voluntary work identities?
- At what point do QuakeRescue members experience their voluntary identity as no longer tenable or desirable?

This approach is supported by my epistemology and ontology that acknowledge the contingent nature of the world (Watts, 1951) and the 'uncontrollable uncertainties that provide the texture of contemporary life' (Martin, 1991, pp. 354-355).

## **1.3 Structure of thesis**

The thesis is organised in nine chapters. Following this brief introduction, Chapter 2 contains a literature review that focuses on identity, discourse and narrative, identity work and power. The review begins with a broad overview of the identity literature (2.2) before focusing on themes most relevant to this study; discourse and narrative (2.3), identity work (2.4), power and identity (2.5), masculine identities (2.6) and finally a brief overview of the volunteering literature as the context for this research (2.7). Chapter 3 situates my research within the epistemological and methodological debates of Organization Studies and documents the rationale

behind the research design. I explain and justify the data collection and analysis methods deemed most suitable for this research. In this chapter I have also introduced the theme of reflexivity and the use of vignettes in relation to my role as both researcher and volunteer in this organization. Chapter 4 contains details of the case organization, QuakeRescue, including its background and structure, details of the volunteer teams and some of the key events and organizational changes that occurred between January 2014 and December 2016.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the research data and are interwoven with vignettes of my own narrative. The vignettes are used to enhance the contextual richness of the story and present reflexive and vivid illustrations of 'being there' (Geertz, 1988, p. 6). '*Searching and Rescuing Selves*' (chapter 5) focuses on the significance participants attached to volunteering and how they attempted to rescue or secure themselves through their membership in this organization. Chapter 6, '*Propping and Shoring, Breaking and Breaching*' considers the ways in which search and rescue work underpinned and sustained the volunteers' identities, and also explores some of the tensions and challenges experienced by the participants. Chapter 7, '*Ground Truth*' focuses on the account of one individual and how his volunteer identity became no longer desirable and tenable, and the ways in which this was linked to organizational processes and practices.

Chapter 8 discusses the data in the context of the literature review and methodology, through three readings; a volunteering reading, '*Altruism, atonement and extreme volunteering*' (8.2); a masculine identities reading, '*Volunteering to be a Hero*' (8.3); and an ethnographic reading, '*Too close for comfort*' (8.4). The thesis is concluded in Chapter 9, together with a clarification of my contribution to the fields of organizational studies and volunteering, as well as including the limitations of the thesis and areas for future research.



## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This thesis is concerned with the subjectively construed discursive identities of individuals in organizations. The topic of identity has an established history in the study of work and organizations (Alvesson, 2010; Collinson, 1992; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Nkomo & Cox, 1999; Watson, 2008) with some suggesting that it 'offers a fresh take on a range of phenomena' (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008, p. 6) and also that it is a helpful concept in mediating between 'individual and society' (Knights & Willmott, 2011, p. 213). Its use as a link between individuals and their organizational lives is one example of this. The study of identity is also important for exploring the relationships between the individual, their wider community and the organizations to which they belong. Despite some authors suggesting that identity is the latest academic fad (Jenkins, 2005) or that interest in it is already passing (du Gay, 2007), its growth and appeal continues across a broad range of studies. Some scholars have called for more in-depth empirical analyses (Alvesson et al., 2008) whilst others argue that future identity research needs to concentrate on identities 'in practice' in order to develop our knowledge of the ways in which identities are 'tied to organizational processes and specific outcomes' (Coupland & Brown, 2012, p. 2).

This review is inevitably selective and focuses on themes directly relevant to the research study. Discourse and narrative are particularly important in the research of identities because of the ways in which they provide potential resources in identity construction and negotiation. Recent analyses have highlighted how individuals use different discursive resources such as personal stories, interactions and narratives to construct their own identities and which have the capacity to influence others in relationships in a particular context (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). The narrative perspective is important in studies of identity because stories not only describe events but also the identities of those involved, 'it is through storytelling that people's lives are experienced and made meaningful, and their identities constructed' (Stockoe & Edwards, 2006, p. 56). People search for a sense of meaning and coherence about themselves by telling stories with particular characters and plots and over time these stories may be revised or adapted as a result of new and different life experiences (Kenny, Whittle, & Willmott, 2011). A key section in this review concerns the significance of power in shaping identity and how this is deeply rooted within systems of knowledge and discourse. Foucault (1977)

argues that discourses may reinforce certain established identities and promote or encourage ideas about oneself, although there is much debate about the ability and extent to which individuals respond, relate and manoeuvre within discourses. It is also suggested that not all individuals have the opportunity or capacity to tell stories and consequently discourses vary in potency; narratives are not equally powerful in influencing social relationships in a particular context (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004).

The aim of this review is to demonstrate discourse and narrative as effective approaches with which to examine the linguistic resources and practices that individuals employ when construing their identities in organizations. The chapter begins with an overview of the key traditions and dominant conceptions of identity together with some of the main arguments in the literature. This is followed by a discussion of discursive and narrative approaches, and their use and appropriateness as theoretical lenses with which to study identities. The fragmentary, temporal characteristics of narratives, together with their meaning-making and interpretative functions are discussed as well as the ways in which individuals draw upon and manoeuvre between different discourses when creating and maintaining their identities. The origins and purposes of identity work are examined in the next section, including the multiplicity of identity demands, threats and tensions faced by individuals in organizational settings. The intricate nature of identity work undertaken in order to present an alternative or more favourable version of self, specifically in relation to authentic and moral identities, is also considered. The next section examines the importance of power in relation to identity and discourse, in particular the concepts of surveillance and self-disciplinary techniques as well as the ability of individuals to resist, reject or adapt certain discourses. The review also explores masculine identities, with a focus on how hegemonic masculinities may subordinate and marginalise some males as well as women. In order to provide context for the study, a brief overview of the literature on volunteering is also included. Finally, I conclude the chapter by setting out the concepts drawn from the review of the literature which are used to shape the research methodology.

## **2.2 What is Identity?**

Identity is a contested concept, with scholars arguing that it 'may be more or less stable, more or less fragmented, more or less problematic and more or less secure' (Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2005, p. 498). Established theories consider identity to

be fixed or steadfast, often aligned with an individual's formal 'roles' (Stryker, 1980), whereas Postmodernists tend to regard identity as an ongoing accomplishment which is responsive to context (Gergen, 1998). Alternative perspectives consider the extent to which identities are integrated in dominant beliefs of ourselves or fragmented into diverse, overlapping and flexible notions of self. Another area of debate concerns the freedom and extent to which individuals are able to construct their identity. From a 'structure' perspective, identity construction is constrained by various forces which restrictively position individuals within existing discourses. These influences may arise from a variety of sources including an individual's psyche or organizational power structures. In contrast, the 'agency' view considers people to be agentic or possess the capacity to derive their own meanings from certain discourses as well as the ability to resist others. It involves the proposition that individuals both make choices, irrespective of how they come to make them, and enact them. The extent to which this is possible is also the subject of debate.

In general terms, 'identity', derived from the Latin 'identitas' (sameness) is comparative in nature, establishing how much I am similar to you. Unlike personality, which is comprised of our individual qualities and beliefs, much of identity theory is concerned with how we conceive and express 'Who am I?' or our 'self' in relation to others, both independently and within a group. 'Self' or 'I' describes our awareness of being a unique individual. Kant advocated a 'sovereign self', a conscious agent capable of independent thought and action. However, psychoanalysts including Freud (1917) considered identity processes to be unconscious and traceable to our earliest experiences. Lacan (1988a, 1988b) argued that an unconscious division of self into 'self' and 'self as subject' occurs in early childhood when a child sees and does not recognise him or herself in a mirror. The reflected image is the 'other' and for the first time, the child experiences him or herself being regarded as the 'subject'. Levi-Strauss (1955) suggested that individuals may deal with the 'other' by either incorporating or excluding them from oneself, whereas Levinas (1969) considered that our face-to-face encounters with other human beings establish a relationship with the 'other'. More recent research privileges the 'othering' logic in which identity is established by how we conceive ourselves to be different or in opposition to 'others'. Othering, it is argued, may be achieved through deprecation or vilification of certain groups (Said, 1985, 1994) and in certain circumstances the 'other' can become the norm (Creed, Scully & Austin, 2002). Some theorists have extended the notion of self or 'me' to include 'my' whereby an individual's sense of self and individuality may be linked to non-human

objects, to physical possessions such as their home or car (Pratt, 2000; Silver, 1996).

Various theorists have criticised the idea of the conscious 'sovereign self' and instead view identity as a reflexive, carefully managed and discursively constructed process. The human capability for reflexivity means that we '...have a capacity to envisage alternative realities and to re-construct and change our world' (Collinson, 2003, p. 529). Individuals may engage in a 'project of the self' (Grey, 1994) which involves a constant revision of the narratives or stories of themselves in order to make sense of past events and experiences and as a means of sustaining a coherent and consistent identity in the present (Giddens, 1991). Identities then, 'rather than being ascribed by birth, ...are now achieved through practice' (Collinson, 2003, p. 530) through our interactions with others in an 'ongoing struggle' for meaning and self-definition (Alvesson, 2010).

Conceptions of identity have an established history in sociological and psychological studies of individuals and organizations with their beginnings traceable inter alia to Durkheim (1952) and Marx (1977). These early notions of 'self' progressed during the last century in two main streams; a philosophical view based on the principle of social organization and a cognitive psychology stream which conceptualised identity as a principle of psychological organization. Led by Erikson (1959), cognitive psychologists have focused on how an individual's quirks and foibles differentiate their personal and social identities. Social psychologists, Tajfel and Turner (1985) developed 'social identity theory' and 'self categorization theory' which examines group identities and the need for 'positive distinctiveness' or the value in having an identity and a sense of being in a group which is distinct from others. Criticisms of these theories include viewing identity as a purely cognitive phenomenon and not a social process, an assumption that individuals step into established, pre-defined roles as well as a failure to consider the possibility of multiple, intersecting identities.

Sociologists, influenced by Mead (1934), have drawn upon the intellectual movement of 'Symbolic Interactionism' to consider the ways in which humans seek meaning about themselves and their lives through social interaction. From this perspective, identity is regarded as a dynamic process achieved through an individual's social dealings in the world. The term 'identity' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'self' but Mead offered a distinction between the two, in which 'self' is composed of both 'I' and 'Me'. 'I' contains the internal responses to social interaction with the 'generalized other' whereas 'Me' includes the impression we

develop of the ways others perceive and relate to us. Social interaction provides a 'looking glass' (Cooley, 1902) which enables 'I' to see 'Me', resulting in an 'internalized dialogue' and a process through which self-identity is formed. This process of reflexivity or 'the uniquely human capacity to become an object to one's self, to be both subject and object' (Callero, 2003, p. 119) is not a pre-possessed ability but developed through social experience. Goffman (1959) further developed the principle of social organization by differentiating between an individual's 'personal' and 'social' identity. 'Personal' identity is unique to an individual and originates from their own life story and attitudes, whereas 'social' identity is achieved through conforming and behaving in the same way as others in a particular social context. Goffman viewed the 'self' as a processual achievement accomplished through a 'dramaturgical performance' in which people use language and non-verbal signs such as gestures to present themselves to others and argued that these 'front stage' activities both facilitate and sustain social identities with 'positive social value' (Goffman, 1959). However, such an artificial separation of the self from society is contentious insofar as individuals can only secure their identity through the views and actions of others.

Other sociologists notion of identity places a focus on a person's self-perception and presentation of themselves in the social world and the elements which enable a 'sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness we believe defines the essence of our individuality (O'Doherty, 2009, p. 108). However, not only do individuals endeavour to sustain and convey their individuality (Brewer, 1991; Elsbach, 2003) but also experience a desire to be included in a wider group or community (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Identity formation has been conceptualised as:

'a complex, multifaceted process which produces a socially negotiated temporary outcome of the dynamic interplay between internal strivings and external prescriptions, between self presentation and labelling by others, between achievement and ascription and between regulation and resistance' (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 301).

From this perspective, identity is a socially constructed process, an ongoing negotiation between complex structural, social and individual experiences and situations which is responsive to context and contingent upon local, cultural and historical conditions and the views of others (Ibarra, 1999).

In recent times, societal and cultural changes have resulted in individuals developing an ever-increasing number of relationships both at work and socially, which Gergen argues is the cause of a 'saturated self' (Gergen, 1998). These

multiple, transient and partial relationships may be the source of different and overlapping insecurities or identity 'dilemmas' as individuals endeavour to secure a stable identity and to overcome 'increasingly precarious, insecure and uncertain subjectivities' (Collinson, 2003, p. 534). Many studies have drawn on Mead's (1934) notion of a 'parliament of selves' whereby individuals construct several paradoxical, co-existing identities. At any given time an individual may '...simultaneously occupy many subjective positions, identities and allegiances' (Collinson, 2003, p. 530) that are unfinished or 'crystallized' and which are 'materially and symbolically relevant and ready to be polished, cleaved, or transformed' (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005, p. 189). These may be drawn from 'an almost unlimited number of possible sources of identity' and as a consequence, 'rarely, if ever, do we experience a singular or unitary sense of self' (Collinson, 2003, p. 534). Moreover, these multiple, co-existing identities may be mutually reinforcing, mutually contradictory or even incompatible (Collinson, 2003).

Much of the research in this area has been developed on a temporal framework of past, present and potential future selves, including possible, ideal or ought selves (Albert, 1977; Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Obodaru (2012) argues for an additional temporal dimension, a 'what if', or what our selves could have been if things had happened differently. The existence of an 'alternative' self in a parallel timeline is important in meaning-making as people often make decisions in the present, or for their future, based on what might have been or based on choices they previously made (Snow & Anderson, 1987). In such cases, the alternative subject positions are often perceived as superior to the current reality. However, other studies have demonstrated that when an individual considers him or herself to be performing their 'life calling', an alternative self does not exist and cannot be imagined (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006).

For the purposes of this study, I am drawing on the concept of identity as a reflexive project that 'consists in sustaining the coherent, yet continuously revised biographical narratives, taking place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems' (Giddens, 1991, p. 5). Identity is formed from competing discourses and experiences in order to provide a sense of security and coherence (Giddens 1991) which involves '...co-constructed or dialogical entities which are 'fabricated' through discourse, 'staged' through performance and 'fictionalized through text' (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 305) and therefore, identity is always dynamic and 'in-progress' and as such the appearance of stability may be no more than 'a momentary fiction' (Brown & Lewis, 2011, p. 873).

## **2.3 Discourse and Narrative**

Following the 'linguistic turn' in Social Sciences, language has been regarded as an active entity through which we make meaning of the world around us and is considered important in the study of human and social phenomena. Two linguistically-based research approaches, which are most relevant to the concerns of this study, are discourse and narrative.

### **2.3.1 Discourse**

The term discourse has '... no agreed-upon definition, and confusingly many uses' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, p. 1127) and means different things in different research traditions. In this study, discourse refers to the use of language in talk and text, a body of knowledge or a set of ideas which are dominant in a particular period of time:

'Discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a topic and a way of producing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. Thus the term refers both to the production of knowledge through language and representations and the way that knowledge is institutionalized, shaping social practices and setting new practices into play' (du Gay, 1996, p. 43).

In addition, individuals derive meaning from discourses which shape how we see ourselves and the world around us. For Watson, discourse '...constitutes a way of talking and writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue' (Watson, 1994, p. 113). Furthermore, discourses do not occur in isolation and are interlinked, so how meanings are constructed, and the effects they produce in the context in which they arise, are also significant:

'Discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking context into consideration...Discourses are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically and subsequently' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 277).

There are two main approaches to discourse in organization studies: the first method studies social texts such as talk or various types of written text and documents in order to reveal dominant discourses as well as underlying tensions, assumptions and inconsistencies; the second approach examines how ideas are formed and expressed through language and therefore how our social reality is discursively constructed. This approach is often distinguished from the former by the

use of uppercase 'D', i.e. 'Discourse' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). Discourse analysis searches for instances of construction, variation and function in a text, i.e. what 'realities' are being constructed and taken for granted in any given context, the linguistic or discursive resources being used to make such constructions plausible, as well as the different ways that people talk about a given issue or phenomenon and the consequences of that particular version of events. Each account functions to construct 'reality' in a way that enables or constrains particular actions and understandings or meanings. Macro-level analyses tend towards the 'structure' view of identity with a focus on discourses and ideologies that appear to resonate in the immediate context and apply cultural knowledge and theoretical or political concerns as interpretative resources (e.g. Wetherell, 1998). In contrast, micro methods are rarely concerned with the agency/structure dualism and consider 'going beyond' the data as 'theoretical imperialism' (Schegloff, 1997).

From a Critical perspective there are several prominent, but not mutually exclusive, approaches to discourse analysis. There are four streams, which encompass the most significant analytic elements and these are: micro-level analyses, a Postmodern emphasis, a broader Laclauian inspired approach and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Micro-level research utilizes ethnomethodology and conversational analysis to study everyday spoken language (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Postmodernists regard 'organizing' as comprising paradoxical and fluid processes and practices (Cooper & Burrell, 1988) and place emphasis on the unpredictable nature of communication between organizational members. A Laclauian approach to discourse focuses on the political dimensions of social life arguing that social relations depend on historically embedded discursive practices which, through the processes of articulation and sedimentation, are drawn upon to construct identities and meanings in the present. In contrast, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on the link between discourse and power and combines systematic techniques to examine social phenomena.

Discourses are generally not coherent or consistent, having a tendency to fragment and transform as well as containing internal tensions and conflicts (Fairclough, 1992; Knights & Willmott, 1999). Workplaces are sites of multiple, fragmented discourses which may compete for supremacy or co-exist, with hegemonic discourses privileging and sustaining those already in power whilst others are marginalised or oppressed (Gabriel, 2008). In their everyday lives individuals are surrounded by complementary, contradictory and paradoxical discourses, which are



‘...the principal means by which organizational members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are’ (Mumby & Clair, 1997, p. 181). Meanings are created by individuals who have different interests and dominant meanings may emerge as alternatives are suppressed or undermined, whilst some become taken-for-granted or ‘reified’ (Clegg, 1989; Mumby & Clair, 1997). Struggles in meanings are played out in organizations as members construct their self-narrative and enact particular identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), engaging in ‘discursive manoeuvres’ to reconcile dual or multiple and sometimes conflicting identities in relation to their role (Iedema, Degeling, Braithwaite, & White, 2004).

From a social constructionist viewpoint, identity is an ‘interactional accomplishment’ (Cerulo, 1997, p. 387) or a ‘casting and recasting of our “selves” through discursive practice’ (Musson & Duberley, 2007, p. 147). Various researchers have explored the discursive activities of employees as they construct their subject positions in institutional settings. Many studies have focused on middle managers who draw on different discursive resources in order to achieve a sense of stability and status through the use of identity ‘anchors’ (Thomas & Linstead, 2002), employ discourses which are in competition with those of the organization (Musson & Duberley, 2007) or ‘incorporate, modify, or reject’ certain dominant industry discourses ‘in their reflexively organised narrative of self’ (Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005, p. 1050). Shared cultural discourses about the value and meaning of work and career may be internalised by employees who can use, manipulate and transform them to serve their own interests (Ezzy, 1997). Discourses of professionalism might be used by the organization as a disciplinary or control mechanism through which work identities are reshaped around corporate priorities, enabling control of professional conduct ‘at a distance’ (Fournier, 1999). Thornborrow and Brown demonstrated how discursive practices within the British Parachute regiment encouraged paratroopers to engage ‘continuously in pursuit of highly desirable yet elusive identities’ (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009, p. 355).

People assemble identities strewn with insecurities about ‘good’ or worthwhile work, careers and professionalism, all of which overlap and impact on their working selves (Clarke, Knights, & Jarvis, 2012; Collinson, 2003). These insecurities, together with other elements of working life, are woven together creatively to create work identities which are ‘contingent and perpetual works-in-progress, the fragile outcomes of a continuing dialectic between structure and agency’ (Clarke, Brown, & Hope Hailey, 2009, p. 347). Moreover, the continual competition between organizational discourses and corporate demands may result in identity struggles

for employees whose self-narratives shift between antagonistic and contrary discourses in order to author identities which are 'stable without being coherent and consist of core statements but not be unified' (Clarke et al., 2009, p. 328).

### **2.3.2 Narrative**

Narrative is a specific type of discourse which is described by Polkinghorne as 'the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful' and may include personal histories, myths and 'the everyday stories we use to explain our own and others actions' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). Theorists argue that narratology adds a crucial element to discourse-based theories of identity. Ricoeur conceptualises identity as comprising two discrete elements; 'selfhood' as an entity which has the ability for reflection, with 'identity' being the product of that reflective process. This reflexivity enables a narrative to be 'figured' through interaction with others (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 80). Identity involves 'the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' in a life history which continually integrates and sorts events into 'an ongoing 'story' about the self' (Giddens, 1991, p. 54), which in turn, must be judged intelligible and be accepted by others (Gergen, 1994). A narrative approach therefore assumes that identity is a process of interactive storytelling shaped by:

'...narratives with plots and characters, generating emotion in narrator and audience, through a poetic elaboration of symbolic material. This material may be a product of fantasy or experience, including an experience of earlier narratives' (Gabriel, 2000, p. 239).

The terms 'narrative' and 'story' are often used interchangeably and whilst this is not unusual (Putnam & Boys, 2006) some authors offer a distinction between the two. Boje argues that a 'story is an account of incidents or events, but narrative comes after and adds "plot and coherence" to the storyline' (Boje, 2001, p. 1). Watson uses 'narrative' as 'a generic term to refer to accounts of events in the world which are organized in a time-related sequence' and 'story' as 'temporally sequenced accounts of events which unfold through plots involving the interplay of characters with interests, motives, emotions and moralities' (Watson, 2009, p. 40). These descriptions draw attention to the importance of time or sequencing which are essential features for coherence (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; McAdams, 1996). Temporality is an integral element of narratives (Costas & Grey, 2014; Ricoeur, 1991) 'because they configure the events of the past, present and future into a narrative whole' (Ezzy, 1998, p. 245). Individuals construct life stories on temporal

frameworks which 'describe the actual past, actual present, and potential future' (Obodaru, 2012, p. 48). 'Emplotment' brings various temporal elements and disconnected events to a conclusion within a narrative (Ricoeur, 1984), as 'a story without a point is meaningless' and serves no purpose (Czarniawska, 1999, p. 15). By organising stories in this way a coherent chain of events is provided hence enabling the meaning making and interpretative functions of narratives (Brockmeier, 2000). Interpretation is central to the narrative process as historical events and sources of fiction are interwoven into plots and events which are interpreted by both storytellers and audiences (Ricoeur, 1988). However, each individual narrative may have multiple meanings and may be 'susceptible to a potentially limitless number of interpretations' symptomizing a plurivocity which enables a flexible presentation of the self (Brown, 2006, p. 731).

Self-narratives are important in creating, developing, and maintaining identity (Bruner, 1990; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; McAdams, 1996) as they not only describe events but also the identities of those involved. For Maines, storytelling is 'an overt, conversational activity that can vary according to a number of factors, including situation, audience and competence' (2001, p. 177). McAdams (1997) argues that life stories are specially devised with 'internal and external audiences' in mind and through their repeated narration to ourselves and others the self-concept is developed (Gergen, 1999). People search for a sense of meaning and coherence about themselves by telling stories with particular characters and plots. These stories are 'precarious' (Sims, 2003) and over time may be revised or adapted as a result of new and different life experiences. Rather than employing a fixed story, individuals tend to draw from a collection of different stories depending on the situation and context (Gergen, 1992) thus facilitating a consistent and plausible account of self (Bruner, 1987; Musson & Duberley, 2007). The plots of such stories are formed in a complex interaction of 'remembered and anticipated events', through dialogue with others and 'soliloquy' or reflexivity (Ezzy, 1998, pp. 250-251). However, stories may include elements which are 'real or imagined' (Czarniawska, 1999, p. 15) as the storyteller may imbue his or her tale with elements of their future hopes and dreams 'which sustain those tangled webs of truths, half-truths and wishful fantasies that make up our identities' (Gabriel, 2008, p. 106).

Narrative research refers to any study that analyses narrative materials, which can range from 'naturally occurring' talk to oral life stories collected for research purposes as well as written narratives found in private, public or political settings.

Researchers are interested in studying narratives as a basic human way of making sense of the world predicated on the idea that human beings are both the tellers of stories and the subjects of stories told by themselves and others. Recent organization and management studies have highlighted how individuals use different discursive resources such as personal stories, interactions and narratives to construct their own identities that have the capacity to influence others in relationships in a particular context (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). Thomas and Davies (2005) observed how during a period of organizational restructuring, employees drew on alternative positions to assert, deny and rewrite discourses of change. Clarke et al (2009) demonstrated how managers 're-author' themselves during the process of accommodating mutually opposed discursive scripts in their narratives. Down and Reveley (2009) revealed an iterative process of identity construction in their interviews and observation of a frontline supervisor. Watson (2009) employed narrative analysis to detail the discursive resources which are used by a manager to weave and secure a rational and continuous identity. Narrative is particularly appropriate for this research as 'the study of human beings by the human sciences needs to focus on the realm of meaning in general, and on narrative meaning in particular' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 11). Furthermore, narrative analysis is useful in that it provides researchers with a viable approach with which to examine the complexities and intricacies of narratives including the temporal and performative elements, the variety of possible interpretations and meanings as well as the motivations, context and origins behind a story (Brown, 2006; Reddy, 2001).

For this study, narratives are considered a means for socially constructing reality (Watson, 2009) with identity consisting of 'an amalgam of multiple, diverse and sometimes contradictory narratives' (Musson & Duberley, 2007, p. 1407) in which the 'iterative process of self-narration and dramaturgical performance are almost seamlessly interwoven' (Down & Reveley, 2009, p. 379). Narrative identities are 'fluid and changeable', constructed by an individual through interaction with others and always 'in-process and unfinished, continuously made and remade as episodes happen' (Ezzy, 1998, pp. 246-247). In dealing with and making sense of changing events, narratives are significant in identity work which is considered in the next section.

## 2.4 Identity work

Arguably, the origins of identity work may be traced to the work of the sociologist, Erving Goffman. In a process referred to as 'dramatic realization' he explains why an individual may actively work on his or her presentation to others:

'While in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure. For if the individual's activity is to become significant to others, he must mobilize his activity so that it will express during the interaction what he wishes to convey' (Goffman, 1959, p. 29).

Assuming that people in a wide variety of social situations strive to shape a coherent and distinctive notion of their selves by drawing on available discourses, would suggest that their 'engagement in identity work is unavoidable' (Watson, 2008, p. 129).

Within organizational and sociological studies there has been considerable discussion about identity, identity work and the discursive means that maintain these processes, with some disagreement about the extent to which human agency influences identity in the context of wider discourses and social structures (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Giddens, 1991; Jenkins, 1996). Definitions of identity work have been offered by several authors (Beech, 2008; Down & Reveley, 2009; Kreiner & Sheep, 2009; Watson, 2008) but in the main these are based on Svenningsson and Alvesson's description<sup>1</sup> of identity work as:

'...people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165).

There is general agreement that identity work is undertaken for the purpose of boosting self-esteem and is essential in maintaining a sense of coherence and distinctiveness, although some writers emphasise cognitive and behavioural aspects whereas others distinguish between the internal/reflexive and external/performative elements of identity work. However, considering identity work purely in terms of an internal or external reaction is problematic and dualistic since it involves an intricately interwoven response of self-reflection and external engagement which is achieved through 'talk and action – with various discursively

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<sup>1</sup> Drawn from Snow and Anderson's (1987) conceptualisation of identity work.

available social-identities' through which people 'announce and enact who they are' (Watson, 2008, p. 130). In addition, identity work:

'... may either, in complex and fragmented contexts, be more or less continuously on-going or, in contexts high on stability, be a theme of engagement during crises or transitions'(Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165).

Several writers concur that identity work is an ongoing process (Giddens, 1991; Musson & Duberley, 2007) which is conducted 'in relation to other speakers' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 18), while others consider identity work to be triggered by anxiety or self-doubts (Collinson, 2003; Knights & Willmott, 1999), fuelled by insecurities (Clarke et al., 2012; Knights & Clarke, 2014) or intensified during times of crisis or radical transition (Beech, 2008; Ibarra, 1999). Conceptualising identity work in this way suggests that it is a reactive or proactive response to social situations and contexts, and not a conscious choice to 'play' or 'experiment' with new or different identities as a way of testing and perhaps securing future selves (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010).

Identity work often has at its foundation a mix of insecurity and angst arising from complex or difficult social situations which may be a result of 'a mismatch between self-understandings and the social ideals promoted through discourse' or may 'arise from encounters with others that challenge understandings of self' (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 15). Some studies have focused on external-facing image preservation (Bartel & Dutton, 2001), whereas others have considered and categorised the strategies for managing multiple identities (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001), or coping with threatened identities (Breakwell, 1986). Individuals may navigate tensions between their personal and social identities in an attempt to be neither too distinct from, nor too alike, a given social group. Identity work performed in order to address this imbalance might involve differentiating or integrating one's individual and social identities (Kreiner et al., 2006, p. 1031). Identity work also enables individuals to harmonise diverse aspects of their identity in a variety of ways; through the creation of a self-narrative which eliminates the 'contradictions and inconsistencies' (Taylor, 2005), during interaction with others, by drawing on alternative discourses, using physical images and symbols which permeate and contribute to their identity (Beech, 2008) or by means of 'cultural resources as well as memories and desires to reproduce or transform their sense of self' (Thomas, 2009, p. 169). Various discursive resources may be employed, as identity work requires 'the capacity to

keep a particular narrative going' (Giddens, 1991, pp. 53-54) in 'a combination of writing one's own story, being written by others and of seeking to write oneself into the stories of others' (Beech, 2008, p. 54), and can also involve the customising and acceptance of certain narratives or being inhibited or confined by others (Coupland & Brown, 2004; Gabriel, 2003).

Identity work is a valuable concept in understanding 'how and why...individuals 'actively manoeuvre' themselves within organizations (Watson, 2009, p. 431), as it helps to explain the complexity surrounding commitment and decision making. Individuals face multiple identity demands in work settings and elsewhere. As well as being surrounded by competing and antagonistic discourses, an individual's identity will be influenced by a diversity of experiences in the workplace, many of which require identity work. Many job related events are seen as traumatic, such as workplace bullying or harassment (Berdahl, 2007; Bond, Tuckey, & Dollard, 2010) or being made redundant (Newman, 1988). That said, for some individuals, positive experiences such as achieving promotion or becoming a manager can bring new anxieties. Self doubt about one's competency, of being an 'imposter' or a 'struggle for credibility' in the new role may require identity work (Knights & Clarke, 2014). In addition to coping with identity threatening events, individuals may experience frequent identity tensions which relate to the task or job role itself, or the esteem in which it is viewed by wider society, such as 'dirty work' (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) i.e. work which is considered degrading or immoral (Brewis & Linstead, 2000). In these instances, identity work is a defence mechanism which enables individuals to 'reframe' and 'recalibrate' the stigma associated with these types of work and thus secure and sustain a positive social identity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Other tensions may exist around maintaining role boundaries that distinguish specialist skills and knowledge, claiming a certain professional identity (Hodgson, 2005), or physical aspects including dress which act to identify role differences, such as suits worn by management and overalls by workers, or uniforms which indicate a certain professional status (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997).

Institutional 'logics' may also involve identity work (Creed et al, 2010). Organizational level change can result in areas of contradiction for employees which undermine the coherency of their identity as well as compromising their sense of integrity. Conscious of these conditions, an individual may carry out purposive identity work by construing narratives which deny or reject the institutional contradiction and thereby reconciling and re-establishing a coherent, more 'authentic' identity. Authenticity is often perceived as a preferred or desirable facet

of identity which individuals 'aspire to' (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) or hope for. There are broad and varied definitions for authenticity, some of which focus on personal virtues and traits (George, 2003) or others which regard it as a desirable psychological state to be pursued (Goffee & Jones, 2006). Heidegger describes authenticity as '... the loyalty of one's self to its own past, heritage and ethos' (1962, p. 117), whereas for Erickson (1995), authenticity concerns the extent to which an individual is true to him or herself, acting and expressing oneself consistently with inner thoughts and feelings. In contrast to these essentialist notions of people possessing a fixed internal 'core', others consider authenticity to be fundamentally relational and 'achieved' dynamically and transiently in social interaction, through the feedback and acceptance of others of our own 'sincerity' (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Erickson, 1995).

Authenticity is important for the construction of identities. In different social contexts agentic individuals may draw on a collage of discourses when authoring versions of self which best represents their current situation (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Individuals may attempt to enhance authenticity through narratives which are woven from a variety of discursive resources that knit together different actions, feelings and motivations of life events (McAdams, 2003). Hochschild (1983) describes authenticity as the 'inner jewel' of integrity that individuals keep to themselves whilst carrying out their organizational roles. An employee's perceived authentic self, 'who I really am', can be an 'idealised' or 'fantasy' identity, a unique, coherent self that is untouched and unblemished by corporate life (Gabriel, 2008; Watson, 2008). Individuals endeavour to protect these particular versions of self through discursive tactics which separate their 'public' from their 'private' self (Clarke et al., 2009). That said, authentic selves do not always equate with 'outside' work identities and inauthentic with organizational selves (Costas & Fleming, 2009). Moreover, identities should not perhaps be 'separated out' (Watson, 2009) because subject positions cannot be determined by any single discourse (Kuhn, 2009). Thus, in keeping with a discursive perspective and in contrast to notions of a fixed or 'true' self, my preferred conceptualisation of authenticity is as a 'variable state rather than an individual trait' in which individuals are neither authentic nor inauthentic, but instead are 'standing on a spectrum of experiences that range from inauthenticity to authenticity at any particular moment in time' (Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009, p. 151).

As well as distancing themselves from the influence of the organization (Kuhn, 2009), employees may also engage in identity work to distance themselves from



what they perceive to be less attractive occupational identities, e.g. a 'manager' and in doing so seek to establish themselves as a good or 'moral' person (Watson, 2009). Drawing upon Erikson's (1964) view of identity as being true to oneself in action, Hart et al define moral identity as 'a commitment to one's sense of self to lines of action that promote or protect the welfare of others' (1998, p. 515). Blasi (1984) suggests that moral identities can vary in content, may have common as well as non-overlapping elements and hold different levels of centrality in people's self-concepts. In contrast, Ezzy argues that, 'being a self and narrating one's identity involves choices about actions that unavoidably have moral and ethical dimensions' (1997, p. 436), hence individuals evaluate their life as worthwhile, or meaningless, through relationships with others as well as in the form and content of their self-narrative.

In a wide variety of work and social settings people have to deal with moral challenges and are surrounded by 'enmeshed' antagonistic discourses. Consequently, individuals 're-author' themselves in an attempt to 'define themselves as moral beings' (Clarke et al., 2009, p. 328) and in order to negotiate preferred versions of themselves (Polkinghorne, 1988). However, 'virtue ... like identity is never a finished product....but requires individuals to work continuously on its elaboration and refinement ...' (Clarke et al., 2009, p. 344) in a self-narrative which provides a consistent account of 'a good life' (Ricoeur, 1992). The 'ongoing quest' to be ethical is a Foucauldian 'care of the self' project as individual narratives are not only self-defining and self-defeating but, in some circumstances, self-disciplining (Kornberger & Brown, 2007, p. 513). For the purposes of this study, moral identity is conceptualised as a social construction with individuals drawing upon a variety of discursive resources to craft a self-narrative which involves 'establishing to oneself and others that one is a good person' (Watson, 2009, p. 446). Since identity is impossible without the 'other' this relationship is always contingent and precarious as we are unable to control how others view us (Knights & Clarke, 2014).

Clearly, identity work is a complex and unpredictable process stimulated by various events and contexts, with a fundamental purpose of achieving a consistent internal identity through the external display and maintenance of certain desired identities (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Pullen, 2006; Storey et al., 2005). This thesis will draw upon the notion that identity work takes many intricate forms in which individuals manoeuvre actively between discourses and adapt self narratives to achieve more favourable individual and external versions of selves. In addition, individuals do not only undertake identity work but also 'play' or experiment with potential future or

alternative selves (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Conceptualising identity work in these ways will allow for the complexities of identity work and the possibility of identity play to be explored.

## **2.5 Power and Identity**

Power is a fundamental part of what it is to be human as ‘an agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to “make a difference”, that is to exercise some sort of power’ (Giddens, 1984, p. 14). Identities are the result of a complex interplay of discourses drawn on by individuals or teams with competing or differing interests (Mumby & Clair, 1997); as various groups attempt to manage discourse to their advantage ‘what is spoken, and who may speak, are issues of power’ (Parker, 1989, p. 61). Thus ‘discourse, power and identity are intimately related’ (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004, p. 240), although this relationship is complex. Whilst discourse produces concepts, objects and subject positions that shape power relations within a social context, power relations also affect the production, transmission and consumption of texts, which in turn influence discourse. Consequently, rather than individuals using discourse to construct identities, it may be argued that ‘discourses...produce the power/knowledge relations within which subjects are positioned, subjectivities are constructed, and bodies are disciplined’ (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004, p. 165).

The significance of power in shaping self is a dominant theme in the literature and studies of identity tend to fall into two broad domains, albeit with some degree of overlap. The first draws upon Marxist notions of power as being derived from sovereign or legal sources and predominantly belonging to specific persons, groups, institutions or systems. This approach adopts an ideological deterministic critique, with a bias towards a dominant view of organizational power as all-encompassing and immune to resistance, e.g. Burris (1989), Jermier (1998). The second assumes a more dialectical perspective to examine the ways in which agentic individuals navigate the inconsistency and tensions of relations of power in organizations, e.g. Giddens (1979), Collinson (1992). This approach recognizes the possibility for ‘multiple and contradictory meanings and realities to exist in the same discursive space’ as there are ‘no monolithic power-structures, neither are there any pristine, authentic spaces of resistance that challenge dominant power relations’ (Mumby, 2004, p. 242).

Foucault's notions of power and knowledge have been particularly influential in studies of discourse and identity. In Foucault's view, power creates realities, identities and produces knowledge. Knowledge and power are indissoluble, forming a self-reinforcing entity wherein knowledge supports power relations which, in turn, legitimizes knowledge (Foucault, 1980). He argued that the 'self' is constructed as both the subject and object of discourse at any particular historical conjuncture, with an emphasis on an individual's sense of self being shaped by the power relations they are subject to and the subject of. Foucault also made a significant distinction between domination and power, so that rather than being possessed by certain individuals, power is exercised over others and may be positive or enabling as well as destructive or coercive (Knights, 2009). The analysis of discourse can reveal hierarchical structures which reinforce certain established identities and the self is a product of dominant discourses which promote or encourage certain ideas about oneself (Foucault, 1980). People 'act' on themselves in 'technologies of the self' which may involve living up to or maintaining a certain identity in which the individual judges him or herself against dominant systems of thought or 'regimes of truth'. Technologies of self:

'permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality' (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

Through their conduct and outward expression of thoughts, people define their identities or affirm themselves from the 'inside out' (Foucault, 1988). As a result, self-identity may be transformed as the 'speaker becomes known and tied to the intentions, thoughts and deeds avowed in the discourse' (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998, p. 298).

Foucault also highlighted the way in which knowledge, constructed through a system of surveillance, is intimately linked with power. Using the illustration of the panopticon, he advocated that disciplinary power through 'surveillance' brings about self-control and that discourse renders individuals to assume responsibility for their actions and intentions. Foucault argued that disciplinary techniques define personal identity from the outside in, as people internalize the categorizations and language which surround them. Both disciplinary techniques and technologies of self are bound up in networks of power which are continuous and omnipresent as 'power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from

everywhere' (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). Wherever there are exercises of power there is also resistance, intertwined 'capillary-like' in every part of societal relations. Resistance is impossible to eliminate, it simply results in a change in its form, as power:

'depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the network' (Foucault, 1980, p. 95).

Individual and organizational power may sustain certain inequalities but through resistance such imbalances may be challenged or transformed.

There has been much criticism of the Foucauldian perspective including a lack of attention to the ways in which an individual may respond, relate and move within certain discourses. Whilst an individual may be discursively constructed and is not free to choose the discourses that comprise them (Foucault, 1980), this does not prevent them from being intrinsically able to manoeuvre, to 'traverse, intersect and hold in tension competing discourses and attendant ways of being' (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005, p. 188) as it is argued that an individual always has a degree of autonomy and the ability to 'act otherwise', however limiting the context (Giddens, 1979). Individuals have agency through 'elements of life history forged by a capacity to reflexively accomplish life projects out of various sources of influence and inspiration' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 622) and therefore are able to criticise, resist or reject certain discourses (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). The degree to which identities are products of agency is a significant area of debate amongst identity theorists. Many studies have highlighted the creativity and ingenuity of managers and professionals in adapting the discursive resources and vocabularies available to them in order to create 'epistemological opportunities' or 'wiggle room' thus allowing them to establish 'preferred' identities (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Clarke et al., 2009). Although Foucault insists that power entails resistance, he sometimes gives the impression that resistance is generally contained by power and poses no threat (Fairclough, 1992). Yet in different circumstances, individuals respond to external pressures in diverse ways, employing a variety of discursive techniques such as irony, cynicism and humour (Fleming & Sewell, 2002; Fleming & Spicer, 2002; Trethewey, 1997). Whilst resistance to specific discursive regimes may be possible, it is unpredictable and inconsistent as people can resist, cope and accept discourse at different levels of consciousness at various times (Kondo, 1990).

In organizations, an employee's subjectivity is perceived as 'a product of disciplinary mechanisms, techniques of surveillance and power-knowledge strategies' (Knights & Willmott, 1989, p. 554). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) argue that identity is jointly comprised of identity regulation and identity work. Identity regulation is a 'pervasive and increasingly intentional' dimension of organizational control achieved through a variety of institutional practices and processes (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 622). These may be coercive or blatant forms of control which can be resisted or rejected by the recipient, or alternatively could be attractive or subtle forms of influence in which the individual desires to emulate or gain the approval of a role model, (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Musson & Duberley, 2007). Taking the view that identity work is both a medium and outcome of organizational control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and 'not just an expression of agency but also of power' (Brown & Lewis, 2011, p. 871) then the power dynamics which may be significant in identity work are those which are 'internalized by the receiver' (Beech, 2008, p. 68). In an ongoing, dynamic 'struggle' often centred on protecting individual or group interests, identity work to construct a new meaningful sense of self can involve experimenting with new or modified versions of selfhood, self-reflection or realization (Beech, 2011; Fleming & Spicer, 2007). It may also entail the ability to activate discursive resources in ways that counter dominant discourses or resist others and many studies have found that 'workers and managers are far from passive in the face of discursive pressures' (Watson, 2008, p. 125).

Even though the workplace involves hierarchical observation, training, discipline and surveillance, these normative and cultural controls not only confine an employee but also provide individuals with the opportunity to sculpt his or her identity through self-monitoring, self-discipline and self-knowledge. Managerially inspired discourses (Deetz, 1995) such as those central in organizational culture (Kunda, 1992) provide employees with an array of 'corporate approved' identities which they may appropriate or draw upon in their self-narratives (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 621). Some studies have suggested that certain discursive practices subconsciously indoctrinate employees with the norms and values of the organization in order to create 'engineered selves' (Kunda, 1992), 'designer selves' (Casey, 1995) or 'enterprise selves' (du Gay, 1996). However, organizational culture as a successful form of normative control is much contested, with some scholars arguing that culture cannot be created exclusively by managers but that it 'emerges from the collective social interaction of groups and communities' (Meek, 1988, p. 459).

Discourses, whether managerially inspired or not, entail different assumptions and silences which reproduce relations of power. Hegemonic discourses favour or sustain those already in power, whilst minority discourses voice the experiences of the marginalised or oppressed (Foucault, 1977). In work settings, some employees are better able to produce texts that affect discourse because of their access to various kinds of power (Hardy & Phillips, 2004), or because 'some voices are louder, more articulate and more powerful than others' (Hazen, 1993, p. 16). On the contrary, those whose stories achieve credibility or 'stick' may gain power, as 'power is really the power to define' (Brown, 1989; Czarniawska, 1997, p. 24). Managers may promulgate certain discourses which articulate an 'idealized' subject position that tends to privilege their interests over those of individual employees (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005, p. 176), as well as maintaining control by providing 'acceptable and plausible explanations which preserve their interests' (Rhodes, 2001, p. 22). Individuals may subscribe to these idealized or 'fantasy' identities to such an extent that a narcissistic and almost invincible sense of self is created which is highly dependent on belonging to that particularly prestigious and successful institution (Dutton et al., 1994; Gabriel, 1999; Pullen & Rhodes, 2008). While such fantasies can reinforce employees' endeavours for prestige and recognition, they might also sustain notions of the 'limitless potential' that individuals may pursue through their work (Ekman, 2013).

Whilst the emphasis on much of the research in this area has been on the ways in which an individual's sense of self is shaped by the discourses that surround them, many other studies have shown that employees are not entirely passive or 'duped' by seductive organizational discourses (Collinson, 1992, 2003). Organizations contain areas which are 'unmanaged and unmanageable' as employees are subjected to multiple discourses, some of which counter the 'official' storyline and which provide opportunities for resistance, as individuals are 'capable of obeying and disobeying, controlling and being controlled, losing control and escaping control, defining and redefining control for itself and others' (Gabriel, 1999, p. 179).

For the purposes of this study, I will draw upon the Foucauldian notion of power and resistance as discussed above, with a view that the power dynamics at play in identity work are more 'nuanced than simplistic control-resistance dualisms imply' (Brown & Lewis, 2011, p. 885). As Parker summarises, 'we need to be even more uncertain about agency and the self. We need, in fact, to ask how the self is implicated, moment by moment, through the medium of discourse, in power' (1989, p. 68).

## 2.6 Masculine identities

The origins of the literature on masculinity may be traced to earlier feminist work where the main focus was ‘... to name, examine, understand and hopefully change those practices of men that hinder or confront the possibility of gender equity’ (Whitehead, 2002, p. 8). This description highlights the main features of masculinity as a relational concept and a social accomplishment that has material and practical consequences.

Essentialists regard masculinity in terms of *activity* as opposed to feminine *passivity*, whereas normative perspectives consider masculinity based on sex roles and the social norms or behaviours for how men ‘ought’ to be. Semioticians consider a symbolic difference in which masculine and feminine places are contrasted, i.e. masculinity is not femininity. Furthermore, ‘true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body’ (Connell, 1995, p. 45). Such conceptualisations are dualistic and contested. More recent theorizations have considered masculinities to be ‘configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and therefore can differ according to gender relations in a particular social setting’ (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836), which in turn causes them to be ‘...problematic, negotiated and contested within frameworks at the individual, organizational, cultural and societal levels’ (Mac an Ghaill, 1996, pp. 2-4).

The relational aspects of masculinities may take the form of hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalisation. Hegemonic masculinity has been described as the ‘pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue’ (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832) and as symbolizing the ‘...currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy’ (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Hegemonic male norms tend to privilege values such as courage, aggression, self-mastery, physical toughness and personal resilience. However, these norms may result in a form of ‘toxic’ masculinity that is associated with ‘...the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence’ (Kupers, 2005, p. 714). That said, hegemonic masculinity is often considered desirable or an aspirational goal, especially in the workplace, but ‘the hegemonic model...may only correspond to the actual characters of a small number of men’ (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985, p. 92).

Hegemonic masculinity ‘...guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women’ (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Subordination may occur in relations between dominant and subordinate groups, where those in subordinate positions are often made the ‘other’. The ‘other’ may not necessarily be women but may be other men, e.g. homosexual men. Although few men meet the standards of the hegemonic ideal, ‘...very large numbers of men are complicit in sustaining the hegemonic model’ (Carrigan et al., 1985, p. 92) and in doing so, maintaining the advantage they gain from the ‘patriarchy dividend’ (Connell, 1995). Homosociality, which ‘describes and defines social bonds between persons of the same sex’ (Hammaren & Johansson, 2014, p. 1), is a concept frequently employed in studies of masculinities as a mechanism for sustaining hegemonic masculinity. Class and race may also be a means to marginalise other relationships in masculinity, e.g. white supremacists. Willis’ (1977) study demonstrates how a group of ‘lads’ built a close male order that subordinated and marginalised other men, women and immigrants. However, hegemonic and marginalised masculinities ‘are not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships’ (Connell, 1995, p. 81). Whilst the notion of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ may be more nuanced than the concept of patriarchy, it is not without its critics, e.g. for promoting masculinity ‘as static and reified, rather than dynamic and processual’ (Ainsworth, Batty, & Burchielli, 2014, p. 38), for a failure to examine resistance, and a lack of adaptability to specific and local contextual analyses or to different levels and forms of masculinity (Beasley, 2008; Hearn, 2004).

Other authors have conceptualised masculinity in terms of its fluidity and multiplicity. The notion of multiple masculinities (Carrigan et al., 1985) emphasises the temporal, spatial and cultural diversity of masculinity. Multiplicity may be particularly significant in workplaces, which are ‘the sites of work and of masculinity’, and may vary according to the nature of the work, the organization, and complex overlapping tensions of culture and class (Collinson & Hearn, 1996, p. 66). Messerschmidt suggests that, ‘masculinity is accomplished, it is not something done to men or something settled beforehand. And masculinity is never static, never a finished product. Rather men construct masculinities in specific social situations...’ (in Cheng, 1996, p. xiv). If identity is assumed to be socially constructed through dominant or subordinate discourses then ‘...masculinities, rather than being predictably fixed to the sex category ‘man’, are more complex ways of being which



attach to males and men through the social codes, cultures, and beliefs operating in any particular social and cultural location' (Whitehead, 2014, p. 442). Also:

'there is no true and pure identity of man, merely a complex dynamic of interacting, reinforcing, sometimes conflicting, discourses of identity, all of which have some association with the category of male and with given social understandings of maleness. Man (and woman) are, in essence then, discursive subjects seeking ontological validation of their (gender and sex) identity, along with other aspects of their being' (Whitehead, 2014, p. 442).

This validation may occur in many arenas, not least in work and organizations. Masculinities have been stereotyped in certain occupations, with working class men engaged in dangerous occupations often considered an exemplar of masculinity (e.g. Haas, 1974). Previous studies have explored the construction and accomplishment of multiple masculinities in a variety of typically male-dominated occupational contexts and organizational settings, e.g. policing (Prokos & Padavic, 2002), military (Hale, 2012), oil engineers (Miller, 2004), firefighting (Pacholok, 2009) and sport (Anderson, 2010; Coupland, 2015). Many of these are team-oriented and involve various levels of risk (Ainsworth et al., 2014) and these features are also highlighted in a study of rugby players, whose aspired version of masculinity was predicated on notions of 'disciplined bodies', performance, commitment and obligation, and facilitated by homosocial practices (Frank, 1990; Brown & Coupland, 2015). Nevertheless some groups of men, as well as women, do not easily fit into the pre-existing masculine frame associated with conventional male occupations (Pacholok, 2009) and men may also experience the gaze of the male whilst endeavouring to be accepted in a male dominated environment (Coupland, 2015).

There has been a tendency to examine masculinity by 'looking only at men and relations between men' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 837) however 'being masculine need not be an exclusive identity. It can involve self-presentations which include behaviour conventionally associated with both masculinity and femininity' (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994, p. 15) because 'women can do masculinities too' (Whitehead, 2014, p. 443). For the purposes of this study, masculinity will be conceptualised as a variety of complex, inter-related temporal, situational and relational activities, as 'there is no single thing that is masculinity' (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994, p. 198).

## **2.7 Context of the study: Volunteering**

Volunteering may be described as ‘...to choose to act in recognition of a need with an attitude of social responsibility and without concern for monetary profit’ (Ellis & Noyes, 1990, p. 4) and can embrace ‘a vast array of quite disparate activities’ (Wilson, 2000, p. 233). The benefits for the individual volunteer may include ‘... the satisfaction of responding to needs, the acquisition of new skills and experience, making social contact, and personal enjoyment’ (Kearney, 2007, p. 7) as well as improved physical and mental health (Musick, Herzog & House, 1999; House, Landis & Umberson, 1988).

Rochester et al (2009) describe three perspectives on volunteering. Firstly, the dominant paradigm that views the motivations of individuals as ‘altruistic’ (Hill, 1984; Bierhoff, 1987; Scott & Seglow, 2007) i.e. giving the ‘gift’ of their time mainly for the social welfare of others, through large professionally staffed organizations in which volunteers have specific roles that are defined in advance. That said, the notion of altruism and the extent to which individuals engage in ‘pure’ altruistic volunteering or anonymous gift-giving is much debated (Nagel, 1970; Derrida, 1992; Monroe, 1996; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Radley & Kennedy, 1995), with some authors suggesting that ‘guilt’, or the easing of one’s conscience, is an important factor in gift-giving (Schwartz, 1967; Maclean et al, 2015). In contrast, the ‘Civil Society’ paradigm encompasses self-help groups whose primary concern is mutual aid and campaigning, based entirely on the work of volunteers and which generally takes the form of activism rather than unpaid help. Finally, there is the ‘Serious Leisure’ perspective where volunteers have a passion or enthusiasm for their involvement, e.g. arts, culture, sport and recreational activities, and include members in large organizations, as well as small community groups or clubs, in roles such as performer, participant, coach, judge etc.

There is relatively little organizational studies research about voluntary workers. Much of what has been written is from a sociological or psychological perspective and has concerned itself with the gendered aspect of voluntary work. In general, unpaid work has traditionally been seen as the province of women, and particularly those in rural areas, because of the expectation that women will more readily undertake unpaid work than men (Skeggs, 1997; Little, 1997, 2002). Psychological research has attempted to tease out the altruistic and egotistic motives of volunteers as well as those deriving from social obligation (Smith, 1981; Frisch & Gerrard, 1981; Gillespie & King, 1985). Clary et al, (1998) suggest six motives for

volunteering: altruism; learning; social relationships; career-related experience; to address personal problems; and to grow and develop psychologically. However, in general, these studies were quantitative and survey based, with some suggestion that the empirical evidence is not particularly robust due to the small size and limited nature of the volunteer groups sampled (Wilson, 2000). Furthermore the link of motives, values and beliefs to volunteering is weak and unreliable given that 'volunteering takes many forms, each inspired by a different set of values' (Wilson, 2000, p. 219).

Conceptualisations of volunteering have been based on several existing theories. Human capital theory draws on behaviourist assumptions that consider the donor's decision to volunteer to be founded on a rational assessment of the costs and benefits of their involvement, whereas exchange theory considers the motivation of volunteers to originate from an anticipated future need, or having been a previous service recipient and so 'giving back'. In contrast, sociological studies have been sceptical of the existence of drivers or personal needs as the inspiration to volunteer and instead view motives as 'constitutive of action, part of a discourse giving meaning to and helping people to shape behaviour' (Wilson, 2000, p. 218). As well as considering motives as providing explanations of the ways in which people make sense of their own involvement, this approach also takes into account a social context as to why people volunteer (Musick & Wilson, 2008). A study by Hustinx and Lammerton (2003), found that for young people volunteering provides an individualised 'self project', and this represents a shift from the classic altruistic and egotistical perspectives to a 'new' volunteering that is reflexive and 'less about groups and duty and more about personal identity, and less about altruism and more about forming an exchange relationship' (Rochester et al, 2009, p. 129).

McCurley, Lynch and Vesuvio's (1998) typology of 'new volunteers' includes occasional or 'episodic' volunteers (Macduff, 2005), employer-supported volunteers, older or retired volunteers, virtual volunteers (Cravens, 2006) and 'disaster' volunteers (Sharon, 2004) who respond spontaneously in the event of natural catastrophe or act of terrorism. Although the body of knowledge about the disaster volunteer is 'meagre' (Sharon, 2004), the categorisation itself highlights the diversity and contrast to those volunteers within the dominant paradigm, who belong to long-established bodies such as the Red Cross who prepare for, and respond to, such events.

Stoddard (1969, p. 188) defined 'permanent disaster volunteers' as those who '...have some disaster training and carry a designated title which facilitates role-playing expectations prior to and during the disaster', in contrast to spontaneous volunteers who 'arrive on the scene at the time of disaster and desire to help', or disaster 'junkies' who go from disaster to disaster and 'seem to receive an incredible high from volunteering and an intense feeling of self-satisfaction' (Bartley, 2007, p. 13). Furthermore, a distinct group of 'high-stakes volunteers' who undertake risky activities that require extensive training and long-term, time-consuming commitment are characterised by their approach to volunteering as a 'job' (McNamee & Peterson, 2016, p. 11; Lois 1999). This type of 'extreme' volunteering may allow individuals to claim a 'badge of honour' for undertaking a form of 'edgework' that may result in death or serious injury (Hewlett & Luce, 2006; Lyng, 1990). In a study of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, O'Toole and Grey found that the close relations of the volunteers along with the danger of the work resulted in 'thick volunteering', in which the voluntary work was highly meaningful and had 'sufficient substance and meaning as to make it possible for those undertaking it to gain a significant sense of identity from it' (2016, p. 8). The construction and development of a volunteer identity has also been linked to intense involvement and experiences in other studies, e.g. Haski-Leventhal & Bargal (2008). However previous studies of such groups has shown an inconsistency between their expectations of volunteering and lived experiences, where the 'volunteering intensity' (Rodell, 2013) resulted in life strain and issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder and burnout, (e.g. Bartley, 2007; Cowlshaw et al, 2008, 2010) and these consequences are in stark contrast to the dominant view of volunteering as promoting well-being.

Volunteering, it is argued, continues so long as the experience of the volunteer satisfies some of the personal reasons for their involvement (Clary & Snyder, 1991). However, it has been proposed that the establishment of a volunteer identity is central to prolonged volunteering (Grube & Pillavin, 2000; Penner, 2002; Finkelstein & Brannick, 2007). Commitment may also depend on the donor feeling that they have been well supported and managed (Rochester et al, 2009) as 'without organizational support, a volunteer identity may take longer to develop' (Finkelstein & Brannick, 2007, p. 113). Long-term volunteers '... tend to shape their own job, adapting their time and energies to whatever is needed to make the cause succeed' and are likely 'to have a strong emotional investment in their volunteer role and in the sense of personal worth and identity they gain from their participation' (Danson, 2003, p. 36). Identity theory is important in volunteering because many individuals

draw on ideas of themselves as a good or 'moral' person who helps others regardless of the reward or recognition they receive (Hart, Atkins & Ford 1998; Schervish & Havens, 1997). This theorisation partially explains why people volunteer for more risky, demanding work than mundane, trivial or routine tasks, because 'they want to be challenged by what they're doing, and they don't hesitate to do something that's going to be hard' (Chambré, 1991, p. 276). Other authors have extended this link to role theory with studies suggesting that people have a variety of roles when they begin their volunteering but, as their participation and 'integration' into the organization continues, they identify themselves increasingly as volunteers and act to maintain that self view (Grube & Pilavin, 2000; Lee, Pillavin & Call, 1999; Piliavin & Callero, 1991).

In summary, many previous studies are normative and quantitatively based, with a psychological dependent variable approach to volunteering (Miles, Sullivan & Kuo, 1998; Laverie & McDonald, 2007; Kim, Kim & Odio, 2010; Barraza, 2011) and as such the literature is often acontextual and insensitive to the political nature of the setting. Whilst some theoretical links to 'self projects', identity and identity work have been made, particularly in relation to the motivation and retention of volunteers, there is a need to investigate from different perspectives and theoretical positions in order to gain 'a deeper insight' into volunteers (Rochester et al, 2009, p. 131).

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This review has examined the main concepts of identity and identity work, outlining the key traditions and setting out the major arguments in the extant literature. Identity research has been recognised as a contested and dynamic field with main debates centring on whether identity is a fixed or ongoing accomplishment, as well as the freedom and extent to which individuals are able to construct their identities. A discursive approach is appropriate to study the complexities of identity construction and identity work of individuals and is central to my empirical research as it enables an in-depth study of how participants articulate their roles through story-telling and draw upon multiple, intersecting and possibly antagonistic discourses. The role of power in relation to discourse and identity has been considered with particular focus on the nuanced and dynamic ways in which agentic individuals manoeuvre between discourses in different social contexts. The review has also explored masculine identities, with a focus on how hegemonic masculinities may subordinate and marginalise some males as well as women. In

order to provide context for the study, a brief overview of the literature on volunteering has also been included.

It is clear from the review that there has been significant previous research on identity and identity work, both at personal and organizational levels. Limitations of the literature include a lack of in-depth empirical studies as well as a lack of attention to identities 'in practice' and the ways in which these are linked to organizational processes and outcomes (Coupland & Brown, 2012). There remains much scope to explore identity work and play, as to date much research in this area has overlooked the 'process of exploration and discovery necessary for creating new identities' (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 21). Identity play typically takes place in settings which allow more scope for experimentation without fear of reprisals and is often quite removed from an individual's usual work or occupational setting. It provides a useful foundation from which to study the continuous evolution of identities and the opportunity to investigate 'the range of the means by which possible selves are created, embellished, redefined and adjusted' as well as 'the means individuals employ to create bridges from the play world back to reality' (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 21).

This review has attempted to set the scene for the empirical work which uses a discursive approach to examine how the subjectively construed identity of individuals is developed and sustained within the context of a third sector organization. The next chapter provides a rationale for the methodological approach to the empirical research in this thesis.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to situate my research within the epistemological and methodological debates of organizational studies and to document the rationale behind the specific research design and data analysis in this study. Social research is a methodical investigation to gather and interpret data in an attempt to explore social phenomena. Methodology concerns the research process; the philosophical assumptions and theoretical backgrounds that underpin the research, their implications for research practice, and for the use of particular research methods (Robson, 2002).

My overall aim is to understand how individuals subjectively construe their identities and the ways in which they draw upon multiple and intersecting discourses. The chapter presents both an account of 'what happened' in this study as well as a discussion of particular issues surrounding qualitative methods and more specifically ethnographic studies. My intention is to show how my choice of method is inherently bound-up with my theoretical assumptions and to highlight some of the central issues involved in adopting an interpretive approach. This is important because as Alasuutari (1995, p. 192) observes 'researchers always become more or less blind to their texts and thoughts, so they do not notice that they have failed in spelling out certain premises or starting points without which an outsider has a hard time understanding the text'.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 3.2 addresses the ontological and epistemological issues underlying the use of qualitative research methods, as well as setting out my philosophical commitments and choice of methodology that follow. Section 3.3 details the research approach including the characteristics and the rationale for using ethnography. Section 3.4 provides details of the research design and the indicative research questions that guided the study. The data collection process and an outline of the fieldwork is contained in Section 3.5. My approach to analysing the data and reporting the findings are included in section 3.6. A summary of my methodological conclusions and approach are drawn in the final section.

### **3.2 Theoretical Issues: Identifying a research philosophy**

Grix (2002, p. 177) argues that 'Ontology is the starting point of all research, after which one's epistemological and methodological positions logically follow.' There are two ontological viewpoints (Bryman & Bell, 2011): 'objectivism' which assumes that entities exist independently of social actors, and 'constructionism' that asserts that social objects and categories are created from the language, perceptions and actions of social actors and that this is a continual process of achievement and revision. Ontology then, '...raises questions of the assumptions researchers have about the way the world operates and the commitment held to particular views' (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007, p. 108), i.e. assumptions about 'the very essence of the phenomena under study' (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 1).

Epistemology concerns 'the grounds of knowledge' (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 1). A fundamental epistemological issue is 'whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures and ethos as the natural sciences' (Bryman, 2008, p. 13). There are several epistemological positions: Positivism takes an objective stance, and applies methods from the natural sciences to search for an explanation or 'look for a constant relationship between events or ... two variables', and is predicated on the assumption that there is one truth and one reality (Robson, 2002, p. 21). Whilst this approach is suitable in the natural world, the disregard of 'invisible' factors in a real world setting has led some to question the appropriateness of a natural science model for the study of social science (Bryman, 2008, p. 15). Realism is another epistemological stance, the essence of which has been described as 'what the senses show us as reality is the truth: that objects have an existence independent of the human mind' (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 104). There are some similarities to positivism in respect to a scientific approach towards the gathering and examination of data but with recognition that '... there are fundamental differences between natural and social phenomena' that means that 'different methods have to be used for different subject matters' (Robson, 2002, p. 35).

In contrast, interpretivism is an epistemological position that takes a subjective or constructionist viewpoint and advocates a fundamentally different approach to social science, '...one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order' (Bryman, 2008, p. 15). Interpretivists view the researcher as part of the field of study that focuses on the social actors and seeks to understand rather than explain individual constructions of meaning and knowledge. Research from this



perspective considers phenomena from different angles in order to explore a rich in-depth view of social situations and to understand the multiple 'truths' and 'realities' of individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The 'close' nature of the inquirer to study participants enables a 'deeper' meaning to be explored but at the same time requires 'self reflection' to avoid the risk of the interpretation being framed within the mind of the researcher (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Whilst this approach is subject to criticism for being highly contextual and for a lack of ability to generalise (Saunders et al., 2007), it is often considered appropriate for business and management research due to the complex nature of organizations and the dynamic relationships of their members.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) summarise the relationship between ontology and epistemology in business research by defining four paradigms that help researchers clarify their own assumptions about science and knowledge. They suggest four paradigms; 'Functionalist', 'Radical Humanist', 'Radical Structuralist' and 'Interpretive', with each being represented as either objectivist or subjectivist in perspective and regulatory or radical in purpose. 'Functionalist' approaches examine problems within organizations in order to provide rational explanations and practical solutions. The 'Radical Humanist' position views an organization as a social structure from which individuals need to be released through change. 'Radical Structuralists' seek fundamental change through the analysis of the structural power relationships within organizations. Finally, the 'Interpretive' paradigm examines the experiences and meanings of employees in order to understand how an organization operates and the intricate, dynamic relationship between individuals, work and the institution (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

However, some authors contend that the four paradigm model is 'limited' and should be disregarded on empirical and methodological grounds as 'we cannot address certain topics from certain paradigms.... because it draws us towards the black hole of pure relativism' (Hassard, 1991, p. 296). Willmott argues that it denies the '... possibility of approaches that are neither exclusively subjective nor objective and which are not solely governed by the principles of regulation nor by those of radical change' (Willmott, 1990, pp. 44-60). When choosing one methodology against another, the researcher should 'assess the specific needs of the investigation before deciding upon an empirical itinerary' (Hassard, 1991, p. 296) and consider the use of a multiple paradigm approach so as 'not to gather data that consist of observations through a single methodological lens' (Alasuutari, 1995, pp. 42-43). It

is argued that doing so may enable 'epistemological variety' and 'greater democracy in organizational analysis' (Hassard, 1991, p. 296).

There has been 'longstanding debate about the most appropriate philosophical position from which methods should be derived' (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 1991, p. 22) as well as the 'inherent superiority' of one paradigm over another (Martin, 1990, p. 32). Guba and Lincoln argue that 'no inquirer... ought to go about the business of inquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs his or her approach' (1994, p. 116). My study aims to explore individual perceptions and seek insights into the 'nuances of meaning' of participants (Brown, 2004, p. 98), and therefore I will be taking a constructivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological stance. I wish to engage with participants in order to explore and understand 'the constellation of procedures, conditions and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and conveyed in everyday life' (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 215) and so an interpretive approach will be the guiding framework for this study of the constructions of identity held by volunteers.

### **3.3 Research Approach and Methodology**

A deductive research approach is associated with a positivist philosophy and emphasises quantitative research methods to test theories and produce precise but generalisable data. However, the focus on 'why' questions has limited ability 'to reveal deep understandings about human interaction' (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) and a concern for a specific research proposition can mean the researcher may carry preconceptions about the data or may disregard other significant results (Blaikie, 2007). In contrast, inductive research is aligned with an interpretivist perspective and begins with no specific hypothesis but a broader research question or questions. Theories are developed from evolving themes within the data. This approach emphasises qualitative research methods that focus on the words and views of participants to produce rich, in-depth data that enables a deeper understanding and allows for comparison between cases and situations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The exploratory nature of this study, seeking emergent themes rather than testing a particular hypothesis, means that an inductive approach is most suitable.

Despite much debate 'no method of research, quantitative or qualitative, is intrinsically better than any other' and so the choice of method depends upon what the research is trying to find out (Silverman, 2013, p. 11). Qualitative methodology

originates from philosophical positions that represent interpretive phenomenology as opposed to positivist orthodoxy (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991), naturalism versus hermeneutics (Hollis, 1994) and subjectivity against objectivity (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Denzin and Lincoln encompass these origins in their definition of qualitative research as:

‘... a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, observations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, natural approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

Other researchers refrain from using a specific definition and instead focus more on the nature of qualitative research, describing it as ‘an umbrella term covering a wide range of interpretive techniques’ (Van Maanen, 1983, p. 9), as an ‘approach rather than a particular set of techniques’ (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 499) and ‘... not a type of research design but rather it is a type of evidence’ (Tsoukas, 1989, p. 520). However, it is widely agreed that the common characteristics of qualitative research are: it is conducted in the field; the researcher is the key instrument in data collection; it uses multiple methods to gather data; the researcher uses complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic; there is a focus on the participants’ meanings; the research design is emergent and evolving rather than tightly prefigured; it is reflective, i.e. the researcher ‘positions themselves’ in the study; and finally it presents a holistic and complex picture of the problem or issue being studied (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Schensul, 1999).

The aim of qualitative research is ‘...to understand and communicate its subjects’ experiences, interpretations and meanings’ (Mason, 2006, p. 22) and is not concerned with ‘generating formal, covering law like explanations but to building contextual, case-based knowledge’ (Clegg & Ross-Smith, 2003, p. 86). The emphasis on ‘words’ rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data enables a deeper understanding that allows for comparison between cases and situations with theories emerging from the data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, ‘qualitative data and argument can be highly compelling, with a distinctive ‘real life’ immediacy and resonance’ (Mason, 2006, p. 22).

Clearly, the appropriateness of a qualitative approach derives from the nature of the social phenomena to be explored, what the research is trying to accomplish, the foci or primary objectives of the study (Creswell, 2013). Examples of approaches relevant to this study include a 'narrative' approach, which tells the stories of the experiences of individuals; a 'case study' approach that provides an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases; and a 'phenomenological' approach, which describes the common meaning of a group of individuals involved in a particular event or situation. Finally, it is the 'ethnographic' approach, which focuses on describing and interpreting the values, behaviours, beliefs and language of a culture-sharing group (Harris, 2001), that has the most methodological significance for this study.

### **3.3.1 Ethnography**

In its simplest form, ethnography has been described as 'the art and science of describing a group or culture' (Fetterman, 1989, p. 1), 'impressionist tales' (Van Maanen, 1988), or 'disciplined reflexivity' (Weick, 1999). For Brewer, ethnography is:

'the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally' (Brewer, 2000, p. 10).

For an ethnographic study, the researcher needs to identify a cultural group that has shared values, beliefs and assumptions, preferably one to which the inquirer is a 'stranger' (Agar, 1986) and can gain access (Creswell, 2013). Ethnographers study the meaning of behaviour, language and interaction among members of the group and 'strive for an appreciation of complexities of the everyday in organizational settings' and search for details that would otherwise go unnoticed, for the 'extraordinary in the ordinary' in order to understand 'what goes on without saying' (Bloch, 1992). Researchers look for patterns of social organization and ideational systems to focus on developing a complex, complete and detailed description of the culture of a group (Wolcott, 2008). A realist approach to ethnography involves the researcher remaining in the background as an omniscient reporter of the 'facts' and representing participants views in an objective account through the use of closely edited quotations (Van Maanen, 1988). In contrast, critical ethnography is

concerned with issues of power, empowerment, inequality, dominance, and repression and may include an advocacy perspective (Madison, 2005).

Interpretive organizational ethnography involves extensive fieldwork and combined methods such as observing, conversing and close reading of documents. This requires 'enactive ethnography' based on 'performing the phenomenon' (Wacquant, 2015) by 'living with and living like those who are studied' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 49) in order to build rapport and enable 'attunement' in the setting. Only by 'participating overtly or covertly, in other people's daily lives for an extended period of time' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 1) is an ethnographer '...capable of appreciating, understanding and translating the situated, creative, interpretive and moral nature of the actual practices of organizing' (Nicolini, 2009, p. 120), and gaining embodied practical knowledge of both the visible and invisible elements of the research site (Wacquant, 2015). With a 'meaning-focused' eye (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009, p. 14), ethnographers analyse symbolic language, acts or objects in order to describe the meaning making processes of organizational members. The researcher must remain alert to the multiplicity of voices and meanings that are produced and reproduced in order to generate 'the variety of insights on which creative interpretation and synthesis thrive' (Morgan, 1997, p. 372) as 'there is no single interpretive truth' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 30).

Wolcott (2010, p. 74) suggests there are two questions that an ethnographic study should answer; 'What do people in this setting have to know and do to make this system work?' and 'if culture, sometimes defined simply as shared knowledge, is mostly caught rather than taught, how do those being inducted into the group find their 'way in' ...?'. However, the specific nature and techniques applied to the research depend on the viewpoint of the researcher. The ethnographic researcher then is an 'improvizational bricoleur' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966) or 'quiltmaker' who intertwines interpretations to produce high quality research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Ethnographic understanding is context-sensitive and centred on participants through both extreme 'close ups' and wide angled 'longs shots' as only by 'penetrating the depth and skimming the surface can the ethnographer portray the cultural landscape in detail rich enough for others to comprehend and appreciate' (Fetterman, 1998, p. 37). Nicolini (2009) describes ethnographic analysis as a re-iterative process of 'zooming in' on the practices and interaction between

participants, followed by 'zooming out' for theorization and contextualization to enable comparison and the 'thick texture of interconnections' between practices to be followed. Fetterman (1998, p. 5) argues that theory is important in focusing the researcher's attention and provides an orienting framework for the study as 'no study, ethnographic or otherwise, can be conducted without an underlying theory or model'. However, given that research materials are 'almost always ambiguous and open to a variety of interpretations' (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 47) the researcher 'needs to be open to emergent issues' (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008, p. 425) and 'even if the ethnographer believes that a certain theory is guiding them or that it possesses explanatory power in relation to their data, there is no guarantee that the research is going well' (Fetterman, 1989, p. 18).

The final result of ethnography is a 'holistic' cultural portrait or interpretation that incorporates the participants views as an insider, or 'emic' position, as well as the synthesis and report from the researchers 'etic' or scientific perspective, although the distinction between these two accounts is often impossible to sustain (Fetterman, 2010). Whilst ethnography is considered both a process and an outcome of research (Agar, 1980), Geertz argues that it is more than simply just fieldwork and a written account:

'From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques, and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is' (Geertz, 1973, p. 6).

This kind of effort includes the capacity to be flexible, intuitive, and open (Weick, 1998) as 'the ethnographer who has lost the ability, or refuses to engage in processes of improvisation, in many ways has foreclosed the possibility for personal growth and learning, and arguably has seriously jeopardized his or her data collection process' (Humphreys, Brown, & Hatch, 2003, p. 13). The researcher needs to be a 'wryly observant' fieldworker in order to appreciate the nuances of interaction as well as developing curiosity and listening skills 'in order to be able to probe research topics and informants appropriately' (Cassell, Bishop, Symon, Johnson, & Buehring, 2009, p. 520) and push data collection far enough (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Imagination and creativity are also important in the process so that the ethnographer 'breaks the habits of routine thought' (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p.

101) in order to reveal contextual truths and deep insights from the data (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991).

Doing ethnography is not without its challenges as it 'involves activities such as reading signals and ambiguous messages in confusing circumstances, whilst maintaining a network of relationships' (Watson, 1994, p. 8). It is 'not always orderly....' and sometimes needs 'serendipity....a lot of hard work and old-fashioned luck' (Fetterman, 1989, p. 12). The time to collect data may be extensive and for the researcher 'handling the delicate balance between self and other in the fieldwork and in the writing' may be problematic (Humphreys et al., 2003, p. 5). The ability to balance thinking from 'within' and from 'without' (Shotter, 2006) is required in order to combine an 'emic' understanding from the participant's with the 'etic' analysis of the researcher (Ybema et al., 2009). When the researcher is 'immersed' in the organization, a further issue may be determining when to stop collecting data and to 'resurface'. These decisions may be driven by time and funding constraints, or when 'theoretical saturation' has occurred and no major new insights are being gained (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Indications of saturation 'include repetition of information and confirmation of existing conceptual categories, are inherently pragmatic and depend on both the empirical context and the researcher's experience and expertise' (Suddaby, 2006, p. 639). Nicolini (2009) suggests that a sign that it is time to leave the field may be when the researcher feels able to document and provide a credible explanation of local practices and how these connect to wider effects.

Ethnography is not without its critics. For Postmodernists it poses a 'double crisis' of representation and legitimation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Some authors argue that ethnography privileges the voice of the ethnographer at the expense of the many voices of the participants, but self-awareness and positionality of the researcher in making sense of the fieldwork, deskwork and textwork can diminish this, so that 'the emphasis tends to be on understanding what is going on in organizations in participants own terms rather than those of the researcher' (Bryman, 1989, p. 30). With regard to representation, Butler suggests that 'the essence of empirical inquiry, is to draw an audience into a collective experience – in which a version of the true is demonstrated for that collective to judge' (Butler, 1997, p. 928). It has been suggested that in order for the audience to decide they should be allowed 'to see the puppet strings as they watch the puppet show' (Watson, 1994, p. 78). Issues of objectivity are recognised and acknowledged because ethnographic reporting by its

nature is subjective (Altheide & Johnson, 1994) and as Stacey (1996, p. 261) argues 'any residual notion that a researcher is some kind of independent, objective observer has to be abandoned. Intervening in an organization always affects it'.

Nevertheless, the closeness of the researcher enables 'thinking from within' and access to critical elements of organizing that enhances the credibility and legitimacy of data (Shotter, 2006). Cicourel (1982) argues that ethnographic methods enhance 'ecological validity', given its ability to capture the everyday experiences, views, meanings, values, and knowledge of participants in the field. It is also suggested that ethnographic research is able to address newer and evolving means of organizing such as distant work, virtual or multiple memberships, in ways that more traditional theoretical and methodological approaches are increasingly unable to (Nicolini, 2009). Furthermore, the nature of ethnographic research with its cyclical 'panoramic views' and 'microscopic focus' (Fetterman, 1998, p. 37) contributes to 'closing the chasm between practice-driven theorising of what people do in their workplace and academic theory-driven theorising about it' (Yanow, 2006, p. 1745) and is particularly 'best suited for grasping the essence of organizational action – the inherent dialectics of matter and ideas' (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992, p. 44).

Therefore, ethnography is the most appropriate research strategy for it is particularly pertinent to a study concerned with identity; as Rosen (1991, p. 2) argues 'ethnographers study others in order to find out more about themselves'. Ethnography is an 'identity-constitutive' methodology as ethnographers are 'engaged in a dual quest for self-identity and empathy' and this research study itself represents my individual endeavour to be recognised and 'listened to' by my chosen (academic) audience (Humphreys et al., 2003, p. 6).

### **3.3.2 Access**

In ethnography access is often begun through a 'gatekeeper' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). An initial telephone discussion with the Operations Director of QuakeRescue led to an invitation to meet with the acting-Director and CEO. I attended an informal Trustees meeting in August 2013 during which I explained the access required, the type of investigation, timescales, how results would be reported and forms of reciprocity. It was agreed that the data collected would provide valuable information for a future recruitment and retention strategy without any cost to the organization, and so the trustees granted unrestricted access and permission to proceed. The Director's commitment to 'total transparency' and



QuakeRescue's core value of 'honest and transparent communications internally and externally at all levels' was quickly demonstrated as I was given an open invitation to join meetings and any other formal activities and social events. An informal agreement document set out the broad principles and understanding for the study and included arrangements for the provision of study information sheets, the collection of informed consent, as well as the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

### **3.3.3. Ethical considerations**

Lipson (1994) considers ethical issues to include; informed consent, deception or covert activities, confidentiality for participants and sponsors, the benefits over any risks of the research to participants, participant requests that go beyond social norms. These issues were discussed with both the Director and Trustees. During my first visit, the Director warned me of the possibility that some participants may become upset when recounting particularly difficult rescues or recalling tragic scenes, and that I too may be emotionally affected by their distress. He assured me that QuakeRescue provided professional counselling for members in this event.

In keeping with QuakeRescue's communication values, it was agreed that I would adopt 'explicit' cover (Fine, 1980) where a full announcement of my role and research intentions would be given. This ensured my integrity and I was open about my dual role as 'participant observer' and researcher. I began by joining as a support member in August 2013, but in an unexpected turn of events went on to become an IRT trainee from March 2014. This membership meant that I was able to create trust and develop good relationships with participants before formal interviews begin in July 2014. This also enabled me to develop sensitivity towards any individual insecurities and organizational politics.

The researcher may also be faced with ethical dilemmas such as whether to report illegal or dangerous activities to the appropriate authorities (Westmarland, 2001) but regular review meetings with my academic supervisors provided a platform to discuss and obtain guidance in this eventuality. My main ethical concerns were to maintain transparency of the research process and protect the confidentiality of the study participants. Prior to commencing data collection, the proposed research was subject to review and approval by the School of Management Ethics Committee. A broad overview of my research aims was included in the email invitation to participants; see Appendix 1 for an example of this overview. Interviews were

conducted at a time and location most convenient for the participants, and before commencing the questioning I restated the study aims and provided interviewees with the opportunity to clarify any aspects of the research. Participants were also provided with a copy of their interview transcript on request. Data was stored in accordance with University of Bath Data Protection guidelines. Access to interview transcripts, audio recordings and personal information was restricted to myself, and if appropriate, my academic supervisors. All interviewees have been anonymised in the data presentation chapters, and any distinguishing information that could reveal their identity has been removed. A list of interviewees, their role at QuakeRescue and the duration of their membership is included at Appendix 3.

### **3.4 Research design**

When designing the study, it was important to ensure I achieved 'thick description' rather than 'quick description' and avoided research by a series of 'flying visits' or conducting what is termed 'jet plane' ethnography (Bate, 1997). I was particularly concerned to make certain my study was not 'observer-present' research that Wolcott (1995) feels ethnography is in danger of becoming. QuakeRescue members met for training activities just one weekend a month and beyond that liaise via email or phone calls. To ensure a 'long-term stay' I began visiting in March 2013 and attended most training weekends from May 2013 in order to attune to the organization and build rapport with members. Initially, I participated alongside other Support Members, and depending on the nature of the training and the practical operational arrangements, stayed for meals and drinks. Operational members slept overnight at the training venues whilst Support members, who lived locally (myself included), went home due to insufficient space and for comfort. However, in March 2014, I passed the recruitment and selection process for operational members and commenced the two year IRT training programme, which meant that I fully participated in training weekends until passing the final assessment in April 2016.

In addition, I communicated with the Director and Operations Director and other team members between scheduled activities. By establishing trust and building relationships for several months before the data collection began, I was better placed to 'capture the nuances and meanings of each participant's life from the participant's point of view' (Janesick, 2000, p. 384). I took care to guard against over-identification by scheduling regular meetings with my academic supervisors during the data collection period, to discuss and reflect on my interpretations and

initial analyses. In hindsight, these meetings were vital as there were occasions when I felt I was too close for comfort and needed to resurface.

The study was guided by an interpretivist epistemological framework and centred on three different but interrelated aspects with a focus on the identities, aspirations and meanings attached to volunteering. While it was important to devise research questions to provide direction to the research, the reflexive nature of interpretive study meant that the course of this ethnography could not be predetermined (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The indicative research questions that guided my study were:

- What discourses are central to the construction of a 'volunteer identity'?
- How is the volunteer identity sustained? What factors present challenges and tensions in enacting voluntary work identities?
- At what point do QuakeRescue members experience their voluntary identity as no longer tenable or desirable?

Implicit within each of these questions was also the issue of '*What identity work does this involve?*' The first question explored the reasons why individuals joined QuakeRescue in voluntary roles as well as how their volunteer identity was constructed and how it developed. Secondly, what sustained them and what represented a challenge or tension for them in their voluntary role, particularly given that most of these people also had a paid job or career, for example what aspects of volunteering provided continued sources of interest, benefits and even joy. I also sought to understand any difficult or negative elements of the voluntary work, as well as the ways in which these ongoing challenges were resolved, or not resolved. Finally, the reasons that may have influenced and shaped any decision to leave, in order to gain a better understanding of the point at which members identities as a 'volunteer' became untenable or unattractive. This part of the research aimed to provide an understanding of the reasons why volunteers left the organization and highlight any identity 'work' undertaken during this process in order to understand the type of circumstances where the voluntary identity becomes one that is no longer desirable or possible.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The data collection entailed the researcher being immersed in the organization in an attempt to generate 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) through an iterative process of evaluating and assimilating theory and empirical data (Putnam, 1983). Data sources for this study included participant observation, semi-structured and informal interviews as well as documentary evidence collection.

#### **3.5.1 Participant Observation**

Participant observation 'represents the starting point in ethnographic research' (Schensul, 1999, p. 91) and is 'crucial to effective fieldwork' (Fetterman, 1998, p. 34). The researcher 'takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects' (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010, p. 1). Participant observation uses an inductive strategy and although seemingly 'haphazard' in the early stages, becomes more refined as the researcher's understanding of the culture increases and uses initial observations as a base from which to formulate hypotheses (Fetterman, 1998, p. 35).

Participant observation allows the ethnographer different possibilities ranging from being a complete outsider to a complete insider as the study progresses (Jorgensen, 1989). Gold (1958) categorises participant observer roles on a scale depending on the researcher's degree of involvement or degree of detachment. A 'complete participant' is fully involved but covert and conceals the intention to observe (Dalton, 1959). This may be problematic for the researcher e.g. by not being able to take notes, as well as being ethically questionable due to a lack of informed consent by participants and the researcher's deception. The 'participant-as-observer' has the same role as the complete participant but makes no secret of the intention to observe (Sharpe, 1997). However this role carries the risk of over-identification or 'going native' (Gold, 1958). By contrast the 'observer-as-participant' has superficial contact with participants' and little involvement (Prasad, 1993) but because of this may fail to sufficiently understand the setting and participants. At the other end of the scale and completely detached is the 'complete observer' who stands back and discreetly observes proceedings, which further carries the risk of failing to understand the situation and making incorrect interpretations. As the 'primary research instrument' (Van Maanen, 1988), I adopted the role of 'participant as observer' as this provided the best chance to get close to participants. This involved not passively observing but actively taking part in numerous on and off-site

organizational events including the Annual General Meeting, informal trustee meetings, training weekends and recruitment sessions. Active participation helped build rapport with organizational members as well as increasing my credibility and demonstrating my commitment to the participants.

A common criticism of participant observation is that those studied may react to the presence of a researcher by engaging in more extreme or untypical types of behaviour (Waddington, 1999). I attempted to reduce this possibility by informally visiting for several months before commencing data collection and by providing a 'truthful, but vague and imprecise' overview of the research objectives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 20). Nevertheless, participant observation enables the cultivation of trust between researcher and participants thus reducing the likelihood of being deceived by respondents (Burns, 2000). In addition, the researcher is able to become part of the scene, joining in 'an emphatic way, the lived experience of the person or group being studied' (MacLeod, 1994, p. 89). Consequently, there is 'no one way street between the researcher and the object of the study; rather, the two affect each other mutually and continually in the course of the research process' (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 39) with the researchers own experiences considered an important and legitimate source of data (Brewer, 2000, p. 59). Other methodologies, it is argued, are not able to provide quite such authentic insight or 'thickness' of data (Denzin, 1989).

### **3.5.2 Interviews**

Interviews have been described as 'the ethnographer's most important data gathering technique' (Fetterman, 1989, p. 37). Interviews enable the exploration of the topics of the research study, to gain an understanding of participants' experiences whilst enabling the collection of in-depth detailed descriptions of their working lives. Interviews also allow for independent and comparative analysis of the accounts of the volunteers (Silverman, 2011). Researchers from a constructionist epistemological position consider interviews not as a means of gaining insight into the 'real' experience of the interviewee but as an 'interaction constructed in the particular context of the interview' (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 13) that leads to 'negotiated, contextually based results' (Fontana & Frey, 1998, p. 646). Although arranging and conducting interviews may be time-consuming and can result in data overload, there are many advantages. Interviews are flexible, focusing on specific aspects of organizational life or alternatively much broader issues and are particularly suitable when examining topics in which different levels of meaning

need to be explored. In addition, interviews are a familiar and readily accepted method by most research participants, who may enjoy talking about themselves and their work with what they perceive to be interested outsiders (Cassell & Symon, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews have been described as 'situated narratives' (Silverman, 1993, p. 108) or 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984, p. 102) with the intention of the 'construction and reconstruction of knowledge rather than the excavation of it' (Mason, 2006, p. 63). Semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow the researcher to develop or probe further on particular points, depending on the responses of the participants. This method is in keeping with a narrative approach because it may stimulate stories from the participants as, according to Mishler (1986, p. 69) 'telling stories is far from unusual in everyday conversation and it is apparently no more unusual for interviewees to respond to questions with narratives if they are given some room to speak'. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were chosen as an appropriate method, as my research questions were exploratory in nature with an emphasis on the meanings of individual volunteers, but with a clear focus; identity.

When designing the interview schedule, I followed Fetterman's (1998) recommendation to begin with a grand tour question, which provides a broader picture, and then specific questions in the middle and later stages of the interview to probe particular topics or participant responses. An interview schedule was developed and tested via a pilot interview conducted in July 2014. The interview was digitally recorded and fully transcribed. An initial analysis of the pilot data allowed for any minor changes to the design and delivery of the interview guide prior to commencing data collection. The interview schedule is included at Appendix 2.

### **3.5.3 Research population and sample**

An invitation to participate was sent via email to 80 current and previous QuakeRescue members together with an information sheet that provided background details about the study. Interviewees were self-selecting as they voluntarily accepted the invitation to take part and this may have attracted certain volunteers whilst discouraging others. A total of 48 interviews, ranging from 30 to 90 minutes in duration, were conducted July - October 2014 and April - June 2015. These took place in a variety of locations including the Gloucester and Wiltshire

Headquarters, cafes, participants' homes, and occasionally whilst at training locations, including one with myself and a participant perched side by side on a cattle water trough in the middle of a field overlooking the Snowdonia mountain range. The research participants, 37 male and 11 female, were aged between 21 and 60 and included newly recruited and long-standing volunteers, and some were also members of the Executive or Trustees. They comprised 19 qualified IRT members, 13 operational trainees, seven from the Salisbury CRT, five canine team members and four support members.

It quickly became apparent that the interview questions had to be adjusted depending on the participant's role within the organization. Operational members had fully completed the training and assessment process, and some had deployment experience so had 'rescue' stories to share. By contrast, at the time of data collection, the trainees had belonged to QuakeRescue for 6-12 months and were almost still in the 'honeymoon' phase, finding the training challenging and exciting, so asking if they had considered leaving was not always relevant. The support members had not experienced selection process or deployment, so questions were tailored around their contribution in a support role, whether they aspired to be operational and undergo selection process in the future, or the reasons they did not consider themselves as potential candidates.

In addition to the pre-arranged semi-structured interviews, many informal interviews took place. Informal interviews are 'the most common in ethnographic work' and are particularly useful in establishing rapport with participants and for comparing the 'shared values in the community – values that inform behaviour' (Fetterman, 1998 p. 38). The researcher may use just one question to stimulate a conversation around a particular topic; however informal interviews are distinct in that they are:

'... different from a conversation, but it typically merges with one, forming a mixture of conversation and embedded questions. These questions typically emerge from the conversation. In some cases, they are serendipitous and result from comments by the participant. In most cases, the ethnographer has a series of questions to ask the participant and will wait for the most appropriate time to ask them during the conversation (if possible)' (Fetterman, 1998, p. 39).

Whilst this type of interview is flexible and provides deep rich data, the interviewee may depart widely from the original subject and the researcher needs to be skilful and sensitive in the timing of questions and also attentive to the tone of the

participant in order to maintain a natural feel to the dialogue. Informal interviews took place in a variety of settings, including in the kitchen during coffee breaks and mealtimes between meetings and training activities, as well as many in the car park where members of the group gathered for a cigarette at various times in the day. These conversations were not recorded but notes were made as soon as possible afterwards.

#### **3.5.4 Documentary Evidence**

As an IRT trainee, I received and had unrestricted access to all internal documentation. In addition, the Trustees and Management Team frequently shared confidential papers and materials prior to their general release. Documentation was collected in the following categories: Public papers including press releases, website pages and PowerPoint presentations; Internal documents including minutes of meetings, policy documents (disciplinary policy, dignity at work, financial control) and letters to members; Archive materials such operational records and photographs from international deployments and project work. Photographic record was made, wherever possible, of buildings, training events and participants, as well as demolition and training sites. These documents were collected from May 2013 to December 2016 and provided a considerable databank of artefacts.

#### **3.5.5 Field notes**

Field notes were assembled that provided descriptions and background details of training activities, meetings and observations. It was essential to write the field notes in sufficient detail in order to capture 'the phenomenon of interest in its variety and complexity' (Katz, 2004, p. 83) so that a 'usable, cumulative body of knowledge' was created (Silverman, 1997, p. 1). Field notes in this study included informal interviews, together with the context, events, individuals involved and anecdotes. My approach to making notes varied according to the situation, although I remained conscious of Taylor and Bogdan's warning that 'if it is not written down, it didn't happen' (1984, p. 53). On some occasions, I felt it inappropriate to write and so made 'mental' notes for later, whereas I wrote copiously during meetings or team briefings as it was common place for attendees to do so. During natural breaks in activities, I compiled 'scratch notes' (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) of key events and observations that were used to write-up full field notes at the end of each visit or as soon as possible afterwards. Goffman (1974) suggests it is important to frame each observation, detailing the event as well as the researcher's involvement and general



impressions. I captured personal reflections or interpretations on a digital recorder, often on the drive home on the motorway, and 'by examining my own involvement in the framing of the interaction, and using my eyes as well as my ears, I had kick-started my analysis' (Silverman, 2000, p. 128).

### **3.5.6 Vignettes**

Vignettes are 'a vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life, in which the sights and sounds of what was being said and done are described in the natural sequence of their occurrence in real time' (Erickson, 1986, p. 149). Their compilation, after reading the field notes, can help to surface and focus the researchers perspective on what is happening, although:

'even the most richly detailed vignette is a reduced account, clearer than life...it does not represent the original event itself, for this is impossible... [It] is an abstraction; an analytic caricature (of a friendly sort) ...that highlights the author's interpretive perspective.' (Erickson, 1986, p. 150).

Vignettes are a form of 'auto-ethnography' (Hayano, 1979) that serve not only to enhance understanding of the story and demonstrate interpretive credibility, but also enable 'audience participation' (Butler, 1997) by providing the reader with the experience of the fieldwork. The use of vignettes in this way characterises 'an orientation towards process rather than outcome; a concern with context... and an explicit recognition of the impact of the research process on the research situation' (Cassell & Symon, 1994, p. 7). Furthermore, the '...use of vignettes is explicitly reflexive' and enables the creation of 'a reflexive dialogue with the readers of the piece' (Humphreys, 2005, p. 852).

Nine vignettes drawn from my field notes are embedded within this thesis. The vignettes are written in the first person and present tense to provide the audience with a vivid sense of some of the trials and tribulations I experienced in completing the research. They provide a physical and evocative illustration of life in the field, '...the very marginality of the craft – being on the edge of (at least) two worlds' (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 231) that observational notes and the accounts of the participants alone may not have fully portrayed. Personal experiences presented in the text may provide 'critical, ironic insights' (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 229) and a source of perceptive analysis for the benefit of the audience (Mykhalovskiy, 1996). The 'self is

an integral part of the field, not easily separated from the analysis' (Coffey, 1999, p. 125) and this became apparent in the re-reading of my journal notes, which sometimes complemented or echoed the descriptions of the volunteers, and other times contrasted with their accounts, to provide rich, nuanced differences of the meanings as well as the physical and emotional experiences of being a SAR volunteer.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Analysis is an emergent and iterative process. In ethnographic research:

'the analysis of the material and the phenomenon proceeds side by side with data collection so that the testing of the hypotheses provides important clues for the collection of new material.' (Alasuutari, 1995, p. 169).

My approach to data analysis originates from an interpretivist perspective and therefore a focus on gaining a deep and practical understanding of the meanings and actions of individuals, with particular interest in how language and narrative are used to construct and enhance their identity as volunteers. Wolcott (1994) suggests three aspects of analysis for ethnographic research; description, analysis and interpretation of the culture-sharing group. Description is important as it is:

'... the foundation upon which qualitative research is built...Here you become the storyteller, inviting the reader to see through your eyes what you have seen.... Start by presenting a straightforward description of the setting and events. No footnotes, no intrusive analysis – just the facts, carefully presented and interestingly related at an appropriate level of detail.' (Wolcott, 1990, p. 28).

Analysis is a 'sorting' procedure that involves creating and organizing the data in a process during which:

'Data are assembled into elements and components; these materials are examined for patterns and relationships, sometimes in connection to ideas derived from literature, existing theories, of hunches that have emerged during fieldwork or perhaps simply commonsense suspicions. With an idea in hand the data are reassembled, providing an interpretation or explanation of a question or particular problem; this synthesis is then evaluated and critically examined; it may be accepted or rejected entirely – or with modifications; and, not uncommonly, this process is then repeated to test further the emergent theoretical conception, expand its generality, or otherwise examine its usefulness.' (Jorgensen, 1989, pp. 110-111).

The interviews, ranging from 2,277 to 13,445 words (mean 6,424), were transcribed into a total of 295,495 words. All data were entered into NVIVO™ software to aid analysis. Thematic analysis is 'a way of seeing' (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 1) that places emphasis on what is said, rather than how it is said. It involves looking for repetitions in topics that recur, metaphors and analogies, transitions as well as similarities and differences. Thematic analysis 'works particularly well when the aim is to compare the perspectives of different groups of staff within a specific context' (King, 2004, p. 257). I employed Boyatzis' four stage process for the thematic analysis; 'sensing' themes, consistently encoding, developing codes and interpreting the information or themes in relation to the literature review and conceptual framework (Boyatzis, 1998, p 11). Before commencing coding, I read and manually highlighted five transcripts to consider emergent themes. The five transcripts were also pre-coded using the same method by one of my supervisors, and we cross-checked my interpretations with hers before I began coding the remaining 43 scripts.

Coding is important as it enables understanding and interpretation in a systematic way, and '... can be thought about as a way of relating our data to our ideas about these data' (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 27). Initial codes were data driven, i.e. constructed inductively from the raw information. This allowed me to develop an appreciation of easily apparent themes as well as more intricate or less obvious patterns in the data. Key words and phrases were identified from which a framework of categories was developed. The categories were then merged or divided to identify key themes as well as emergent and sub-themes in as many of the transcripts as possible. A list of themes such as 'camaraderie', 'elitism', 'risk', 'insecurity' and 'team' was kept throughout the process. A second cycle of analysis developed a 'pattern' of codes where themes, relationships and theoretical constructs were formed. These themes were used to prepare draft data presentation chapters, which with feedback from my supervisors and an iterative review of the data were further refined, merged or collapsed.

Fetterman (2010) advocates multiple forms of analysis in his approach to ethnography and recommends testing one source against another, looking for patterns of behaviour and focusing on key events. Doing so, he argues, may crystallize an ethnographer's thoughts to provide 'a mundane conclusion, a novel insight or an earth shattering epiphany' (Fetterman, 2010, p. 109). Other steps in the analysis procedure may involve review and critique of the research process and

proposing a redesign for the study (Creswell, 2013). However, an interpretive study should not simply explore and describe (Singleton, 1988) but requires the 'transcendence' of the research material (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.46) in order to 'lift the data to a conceptual level' (Suddaby, 2006, p. 636). The interpretation stage involves 'activities such as reading signals and ambiguous messages in confusing circumstances, whilst maintaining a network of relationships' (Watson, 1994, p. 8) to enable data 'transformation' in which the researcher has to go beyond the data and decide 'what is to be made of them' (Wolcott, 1994, p. 36). This entails the researcher drawing inferences from the data or turning to theory to provide a framework for his or her personalised interpretations, or in other words, 'this is what I make of it' (Wolcott, 1994, p. 44). However, the separation of evidence and interpretation is essential to enable a 'distinction between informants first order conception of what is going on in the setting and the researcher's second order conceptions of what is going on' (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 540).

### **3.6.1 Plausibility and Credibility**

Guba and Lincoln (1986) outline two criteria for evaluating qualitative research; 'trustworthiness' e.g. credibility, transferability, and 'authenticity' in wider ontological and fairness concerns. More recently the issue of evaluating qualitative research has become rather contested, for example, Yardley (2000) proposes, sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence as well as impact and importance. Spencer et al (2003) extend this list to suggest 18 'quality indicators', although many researchers have voiced concerns over what they perceive to be a checklist that may be too prescriptive or rigid. Hammersley (1992) agrees that authenticity is important, but argues that the amount and kind of evidence used in an empirical account should be plausible and credible as well as relevant.

More specifically, the challenge for Ethnographers is choosing criteria to apply in judging the quality of ethnographic research (Humphreys et al., 2003). In the past these criteria have tended to focus on the text e.g. plausibility (Van Maanen, 1988), narrative coherence (Bruner, 1990), verisimilitude (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998), authority (Rabinow, 1996), authenticity and criticality (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). However, Spindler and Spindler (1987, p. 18) suggest nine criteria of 'good' ethnography; observations that are contextualized; hypotheses that emerge 'in situ' as the study continues; prolonged and repetitive observation; the native view of reality is obtained through multiple methods; knowledge is elicited from participants in a systematic fashion; instruments, codes, interview schedules etc are generated

'in situ' as a result of inquiry; a transcultural comparative perspective is frequently an unstated assumption; the ethnographer makes explicit what is implicit and tacit to informants; and finally, the ethnographer must not predetermine interview responses by the type of questions. Humphreys et al. (2003, p. 17), recommend that evaluation of ethnography should be 'focused primarily on the (ethnographic) process, and only secondarily on the text'. Therefore, the critical appraisal of one's own research practices or 'reflexivity' must be an important element of any type of effective research work (Cassell & Symon, 2004).

### **3.6.2 Reflexivity and Textuality**

Reflexivity is concerned with the notion that it is not possible for a social researcher to be detached from what he or she is observing (Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999). The 'subjective metatheoretical commitments' (Johnson & Duberley, 2003, p. 1280) held by researchers cannot be detached from his or her thinking whilst undertaking research, as 'qualitative researchers have open minds, but not empty minds' (Janesick, 2000, p. 384). Consequently, these influences must be scrutinised and exposed through our capacity for reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1984).

Reflexivity is an on-going self-reflective process that requires researchers to be critical of their own assumptions (Hassard, 1993) and avoid making excessive claims to authority (Burrell, 1993). Self-reflection is an 'inquiry from the inside' (Evered & Louis, 1981) that involves not only an interrogation of the choice of research methods, together with an awareness in dealing with the feelings and emotions of participants with integrity and sensitivity, but also a critical appraisal as to whether the data are providing a genuine insight or are what the participants want the researcher to hear. The researcher must appreciate that 'knowledge of methods and theoretical paradigms alone is therefore insufficient for engaging in the craft of research' (Prasad, 2005, p. 7) and that reflexivity is vital if the researcher does not want to '... follow a well-constructed method, but produce findings that are obvious or trite' (Suddaby, 2006, p. 635). Fundamentally, researchers need to allow their assumptions to be challenged, as 'we can never improve our understanding unless we examine and reformulate our assumptions' (Douglas, 1986, p. 8). Therefore, researchers should be open to 'criticism and debate' (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p. 422) and also willing to share surprises, as 'ethnography...works best when it surprises us, when it overturns preconceived notions or exposes the limits of our prior understanding' (Humphreys et al., 2003, p. 19).

Reflexivity also entails thinking about the role of the researcher in shaping the inquiry and the inherent inequalities between the fieldworker and the participants (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Although precedence must be 'accorded to the perspectives of those being studied' (Bryman, 1989, p. 135), some sensitivity must remain about the 'impact of the researcher's identity, experience and value commitments' (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p. 422). As Reinharz (1997, p. 3) notes, 'we not only 'bring the self to the field... (we also) create the self in the field', suggesting that reflexivity involves more than explaining the researcher's influence on the interpretations, but includes understanding our identity as researchers. Hence, the character and background of the researcher should be an explicit part of the research design (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to enable an analysis that is both self-reflective and self-critical, rather than an authoritative text that seems to present objective truths (Willmott, 1993).

In adopting an interpretive stance, reflexivity presents another layer of context, that of the narrator (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). A reflexive researcher should disclose any preconceptions or beliefs that may bias the research as 'our readers have the right to know.....what prompts our interests in the topics we investigate, to whom we are reporting, and what we personally stand to gain from our study' (Wolcott, 2010, p. 36). Ethnographic writers tell 'a good story' (Richardson, 1990) and texts should be 'vital...not boring' and thus 'invite readers to engage the author's subject matter' (Denzin, 1998, p. 504). However the method of writing ethnography is 'sprawling, diffuse, undefined and diverse' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 24). There is no correct or incorrect way of writing ethnography as there is 'no way of seeing, hearing or representing the world of others that is absolutely, universally valid or correct' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 35) so that even competent observers are unlikely to report 'with objectivity, clarity and precision...on their own observations of the social world' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 11).

The aim of an ethnographic account is to achieve 'thick' description that means the text 'presents detail, content, emotion, and the webs of social relationships... (and) evokes emotionality and self-feelings... The voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard' (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). The polyphonic nature of the interpretive approach generates a text that is not only authored by the researcher, but also the participants and theorists, thus producing a 'literary collage' (Czarniawska, 1999, p. 24). The skill and style of the writer in drawing upon literary conventions and using rhetorical devices, such as tropes and metaphors, is vital to

convince the audience of the credibility and authenticity of the text and the final account is to some extent a work of fiction (Van Maanen, 1979). The individual reader relates the text to their unique personal experiences so that 'the construction of meaning results from an interplay between the text, author and reader in ways which are pluralistic and dynamic' (Brown, 2004, p. 97).

Reflexivity is a central part of producing a text, as 'writing – of all the texts, notes, presentations and possibilities – is also a process of discovery: the discovery of the subject (and sometimes the problem itself) and discovery of the self' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 184). The writer asserts their 'authorial personality' (Alvesson, Hardy, & Harley, 2008, p. 484) by revealing:

'their personal investments in the research, various biases they bring to their work, their surprises and undoing's in the process of the research endeavour, the ways in which their choices of literature tropes lend rhetorical force to the research report and the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view' (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027).

This highlights the one-sided nature of ethnographic research and the author's power in the research process and in framing the report with dominant and subordinate meanings from their privileged position (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). However, although ethnographers have become increasingly aware of the significance of reflexivity, 'blind spots' such as emotion, embodiment and power relationships tend to persist in the self-reflective accounts of the researcher (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to situate my research within the epistemological and methodological debates of organizational studies in general and to document the rationale behind the specific research design and data analysis in this study. A failure to do so, '... to make unexamined metatheoretical commitments, and remain unaware of their origins, amounts to an abdication of intellectual responsibility which results in poor research practices' (Johnson & Duberley, 2003, p. 1280). The objective of my research is to understand the meanings and provide an insight into which elements of being a volunteer are important and valuable to individual members of a single organization. In adopting a qualitative approach, there are a range of methods available and choices to make to ensure 'the research question is

matched with strategy' (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 40). This interpretive study used an ethnographic framework to focus on the socially constructed nature of identities in seeking to describe and understand the meanings individuals attach to their volunteer roles. Ethnography enabled a close and relatively prolonged relationship (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and allowed for multiple methods including participant observation, semi-structured and informal interviews, as well as the examination of texts and documents. In summary, for the purposes of this study, it has been appropriate to draw upon an interpretivist inductive framework and employ a social constructivist lens. The next chapter provides background information about the case organization, QuakeRescue.



## 4. CASE ORGANIZATION: QUAKERESCUE

### 4.1 Introduction

The case organization is a search and research charity, which I have given the pseudonym 'QuakeRescue' because of its primary focus on disaster response work. The purpose of this chapter is to supply background information about QuakeRescue and to outline the story of its volunteer members, in order to provide context for the study. At this point, I recommend reading the list of abbreviations provided on page 13. The next section (4.2) provides a brief history and overview of the organization together with its strategic aims and values. This is followed by details of the organizational structure and the composition of the three volunteer teams in sections 4.3 and 4.4. Finally, section 4.5 reports the key events and organizational changes that occurred between January 2014 and December 2016.

### 4.2 Background<sup>2</sup>

Founded in 1996, QuakeRescue is a voluntary humanitarian organization with a global capability to deliver an effective and professional service to those in need or at risk from disasters. QuakeRescue offers a 365 day, 24 hour emergency response to disasters anywhere in the world. Its strategic aims are described as:

*QuakeRescue is a humanitarian assistance and disaster response charity that supports domestic and international communities in times of need.*

*We train and equip dedicated members of the public, emergency service and former military service personnel alongside young people who benefit from a new purpose in life.*

*By creating multi-disciplinary teams of volunteers, we deliver immediate response when and where required.*

The team are able to deploy within hours of a disaster, but only when they have assessed that they are able to make a meaningful contribution and their offer of assistance has been accepted by the affected country. In addition to being equipped to start rescue work immediately upon arrival, they also take adequate resources to ensure they are fully self-sufficient and only a positive asset to the local community. This is considered to be vital, as on numerous occasions they have observed the chaos when a collapsed infrastructure is inundated by the international community,

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<sup>2</sup> Background information drawn from various QuakeRescue documents including 'Volunteer & Staff Handbook' and website @ December 2016.

and put under more strain by well-meaning, but poorly equipped, spontaneous disaster volunteers.

In addition to USAR, QuakeRescue capabilities include flood rescue, specialist search dogs, incident command and control, relief team co-ordination, humanitarian needs assessment and the provision of water sanitation systems. QuakeRescue has also delivered resilience, disaster risk reduction and SAR training to INSARAG<sup>3</sup> guidelines in disaster prone countries including India, Pakistan, Portugal, Peru, Oman, France, Spain and Turkey. Professional disaster advice has also been provided to various governments and high profile companies. In addition, QuakeRescue works in partnership with various UK and international universities to develop the body of knowledge and research into disaster management.

In the past QuakeRescue had received one-off grants and assistance in deploying to disasters from the British Government, but it does not receive any routine official funding and therefore relies on public support and donations in order to enable it to provide the response, assistance or training wherever and whenever it may be needed. Indeed, its provision of services relies on 110 volunteers, consisting 75 males and 35 females, aged between 21 and early 60's, ten of whom are involved purely in a support capacity. The volunteers, who willingly give their time to train and deploy on emergency response and training missions, are from around the UK and a variety of occupational backgrounds including; IT and communication experts, media, emergency services, management consultancy, farming, NHS physiotherapy and clinical psychology, electrical contractors, mechanical engineers and local government risk/resilience officers. QuakeRescue provide all the training that an individual requires to become a competent member of the organization. In recognition that the work is physically and emotionally demanding, the selection process for IRT members is rigorous, as well as the training programme that takes two years to complete in order to 'get the badge' or be fully competent for deployment.

At the time of my first visit in March 2013, QuakeRescue were based in a partially heated industrial unit in Gloucestershire that contained a kitchen/dining room, equipment store, an administrative office, a training/meeting room, and bathroom facilities. The members had recently held a Special General Meeting where they

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<sup>3</sup> International Search and Rescue Advisory Group; a network of 80+ countries and organizations under the umbrella of the United Nations, aiming to establish minimum standards for USAR teams and methodology for international co-ordination in earthquake response.

passed a 'vote of no confidence' in the Director, claiming that the charity was suffering from 'Founder Syndrome' under his leadership. He had left acrimoniously, registered the charity name as his own intellectual property and was also attempting to trademark the 'logo'. The interim-Director and Operations Director were in the process of a counter-claim and legal challenge. At the Annual General Meeting in May 2013, a new organization structure was agreed and the interim Director (Jack Hammer<sup>4</sup>), Operations Director (Billy Blazes) and two new Trustees (#34, #35) were officially voted in. My feeling at the meeting was that this was an unsettling period for the members, with the organization's identity itself at risk, but there was strong agreement that their underlying values (fig 4.1), beliefs and purpose remained unchanged, if not strengthened, and the departure of the old Director enabled an opportunity for much needed change, strategic development and growth.

**Fig 4.1 QuakeRescue values**

- Deliver our objectives as a team and recognise each other's value and ability.
- Do everything with respect and dignity.
- Work together with openness and honesty.
- Be transparent in our decision making.
- Trust each other.
- Always look for the best solution which is not necessarily that within our control.
- Provide leadership to all situations and consider it part of the solution.
- Support our members where possible in their personal and professional development.
- Not to discriminate on any grounds.

Over the remainder of 2013, it became apparent that the legal action would not be resolved until late 2014; the mounting costs were unsustainable and ultimately may have forced QuakeRescue to close. Furthermore, international deployment was unlikely as long as the legal action continued. Faced with these issues, the Management Team completed an 'option appraisal' and decided to drop the legal

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<sup>4</sup> Fictional character names are drawn from the animated children's TV series '*Rescue Heroes*' (1999-2003) that centred on a group of rescue personnel who aim to save lives around the globe from natural and man-made disasters, and emergency situations.

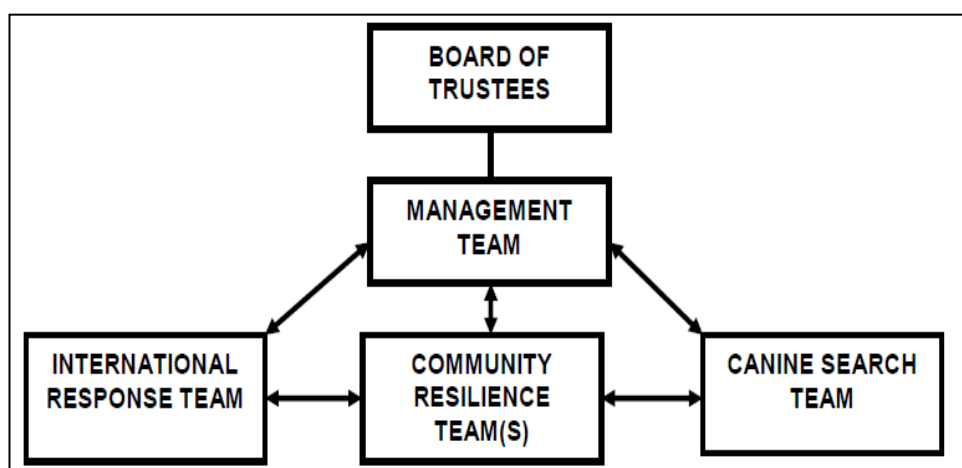
counter-claim in respect of the trademark and reached a compromise agreement with the ex-Director.

In addition, in December 2013, a partnership was formalised with a new group for military veterans and injured service personnel, to secure the charity's future and enable strategic development and diversification. The aims of the partnership included developing a new model of emergency and disaster response, both internationally and in the UK through the establishment of Community Resilience Teams (CRTs), to complement the existing IRT and Canine Search teams. At the Annual General Meeting held in May 2014, the members voted unanimously to formally merge the two organizations.

#### 4.3 Structure

Merger with the new charity brought a new structure (Fig. 4.2) as well as several celebrity ambassadors who were famous for feats of extreme personal and physical resilience, or had links to the Armed Forces. The Board of Trustees initially comprised five trustees, four of whom were elite business men as well as Jack Hammer. Jack, an experienced emergency services manager and long-standing experienced member of QuakeRescue was, the members said, regarded as a trusted father figure by the volunteer teams. Two of the trustees later stepped down, partly due to tension with some management and members, and also to streamline the decision making process.

**Fig. 4.2 QuakeRescue organizational structure**



The Management team then consisted of an Operations Director (Billy Blazes), a Training & Development Manager who was responsible for the accreditation of training programmes and development of expert services, as well as a Director for Disaster Risk Reduction who oversaw international project work. Funding was secured from an external body for two paid employees, one full-time Operations Manager, who was also an IRT and CRT volunteer, as well as one part-time public relations/ professional fundraiser.

There was an urgent need to improve the financial situation of the organization, as the dispute with the former director had cost in excess of £10,000 in legal fees and had not only diminished QuakeRescue's monetary reserves but also reduced its focus on fundraising activities. 'QuakeRescue Ltd' was established to enable income generation activities, primarily aimed at large corporations, through the provision of accredited 'expert services' that included critical incident management and command, fire warden training, team building and hostile environment training. Other fundraising activities included providing support services at large-scale public events such as the Virgin Kite Surfing Armada, as well as an annual QuakeRescue ball and charity auction. These activities increased financial turnover from £13,542 in 2013/2014, to £24,686 in 2014/2015.

#### **4.4 Volunteer teams**

##### **4.4.1 International Response Team (IRT)**

Based at QuakeRescue headquarters in Wiltshire, the IRT consists of 28 (24 male/4 female) highly trained and experienced volunteer disaster response specialists. IRT have over 20 years' experience in this field and have deployed on 22 operational missions to some of the world's most devastating disasters including in Iran, Indonesia, Haiti, Peru, Turkey, Pakistan and Nepal. IRT deployments to natural disasters may be sporadic and at the time of my first visit in 2013, the last mission had been to Haiti some three years earlier. Some of these previous deployments had been particularly challenging, not only because of the scale of destruction and human tragedy, but because of a lack of infrastructure and civil unrest in-country, for example, in Haiti the team had needed armed guards to protect them and their equipment while they carried out their search and rescue activities. When an earthquake occurs IRT members are sent a text message that requires them to confirm their availability for a deployment of up to 14 days duration. A team with mixed skills and experience is collated from those who volunteer, overseen by a

team leader or the Operations Director. The conflict with the former director and changes in structure had led to the resignation of many very experienced responders, so that at the commencement of the study only 11 of the 48 interviewees had firsthand mission experience.

The recruitment process for IRT members takes place approximately every two years and involves a 36 hour non-stop 'selection' weekend, where potential candidates are put through a series of simulated disaster based challenges. These include night-time orienteering, abseiling, extracting casualties from confined spaces, leadership and team tasks, carrying equipment or casualty-laden stretchers over long distances and hostile border crossings, all with little food and no sleep. Successful participants are then invited to complete the two-year IRT training programme, which entails one full weekend per month of both classroom and practical USAR training including working in confined spaces, SWAH, technical search and rescue methods, maintenance and use of heavy duty breaking and breaching equipment, propping and shoring of collapsed structures and casualty handling. However, completion of the two year training programme does not guarantee a place on the IRT and trainees are required to successfully complete a continuous five night and day final operational assessment before 'getting the badge'. The final assessment was described as:

*'... not designed to break anybody, but it is very, very hard. We want the team to understand the challenges of applying their technical skills when they are exhausted, a long way from home, and in an unfamiliar environment; we also want the international community to be reassured that the rescuers we send to disasters are as ready as anyone can be to help' (Billy Blazes, Operations Director)*

During the assessment, trainees are subjected to a variety of challenging scenarios across the UK, with the support of hundreds of volunteers from different agencies and other international USAR teams acting as casualties, onlookers or local 'officials'. However, it is not uncommon for one or two trainees to fail this final stage and ultimately not be allowed to join the IRT.

In addition to USAR, IRT can also conduct flood response, establish 'Command and Control' systems, organise relief teams, coordinate between the rescue and relief phases of a disaster and will, in the future, engage in post-disaster rebuilding. IRT members have also delivered high quality training programmes to rescue teams

around the world and this commitment remains central to their mission. IRT can deploy to any disaster around the globe, but will also operate within the UK as required. In February 2014, the IRT together with members of the CRT, assisted with flood response in Wiltshire.

#### **4.4.2 Community Resilience Teams (CRT)**

Two CRTs, established in 2013 and 2014, based in Salisbury and Portsmouth, support UK emergency services and local authorities in their response to emergencies and major incidents. CRT Salisbury comprises 41 volunteers (27 male/14 female) and CRT Portsmouth has a total membership of 23 (14 male/9 female). Although membership is 'open', recruitment is specifically targeted at veterans from the Armed Forces and Emergency Services '*with their proven commitment and leadership skills*'<sup>5</sup>. However, unlike the IRT, there is no formal selection process for CRT members.

In addition to flood response in Wiltshire in 2014, the CRT also deployed to Cumbria and Yorkshire in 2015. Whilst the team are fully qualified for swift water rescue these deployments were predominantly recovery based work, including assisting flood victims to clear their homes and restoring public amenities, including a local GP/health centre, so it could reopen and provide vital services to the local population. As part of their community focus, the CRT aims to:

*'... engage, recruit and empower people from all walks of life, young people, long term-unemployed, ex-military and emergency services personnel but above all members of the public who want to help other people. By doing this we aim to transform the lives and skills of the people involved, but also the communities around them'.*

The CRT endeavour to achieve this goal by supporting a variety of local community projects ranging from renovating a local village hall, assisting an elderly housebound gentleman to visit his wife in hospital for the first time in six months, delivering youth programmes in partnership with The Princes' Trust and a college in Wiltshire, as well as a variety of profile and fund raising activities.

#### **4.4.3 Canine Search team**

The Canine Search team, based in Gloucester, consists of eight members (4 male/4 female), two of whom are fully IRT qualified, as well as five canines. The team train

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<sup>5</sup> QuakeRescue website December 2016

most weekends for two to three years before assessment as an operational asset, with the dogs being trained specifically to scent live casualties rather than cadavers. In the past they have deployed to earthquakes in 2003 to Iran, as well as Turkey and Columbia in 1999, although none of the current dogs have attended international disasters with QuakeRescue, and only one of the handlers has earthquake response experience. The team work to International Rescue Dog Organization standards and regularly collaborate with the British International Rescue Dog team, the Avon and Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire police and fire services. Within the UK, they have assisted with collapsed structures and high-risk missing person searches.

The canine team is an important part of the QuakeRescue disaster response, as they accelerate the search process by locating casualties or by narrowing the search area, after which the IRT are able to use specialist technical search equipment to pin-point the position of a casualty. The team are currently working towards training the dogs for searching in and around riverbanks and water in the UK, which would enable them to potentially deploy with the CRT and extend their missing person search capabilities.

#### **4.5 Key events: Jan 2014 – Dec 2016**

In January and February 2014, QuakeRescue held two open days for potential applicants. These included a formal presentation that provided background information about the training, the technical difficulty of some rescues, the grim reality of earthquake zones and in particular the level of commitment required to get through the entire process (see fig 4.3). Live demonstrations of technical searches and breaking and breaching methods were also provided by the IRT and Canine Search teams.

Interested candidates were then invited to apply to attend one of two selection weekends in March 2014. Over the two weekends, approximately 40 applicants, including myself, were subjected to 36 hours of disaster scenario activities in freezing temperatures with no sleep and little food. The selection process is deliberately designed to weed out ‘crusader’ types (McNamee & Peterson, 2015) or what QuakeRescue called ‘badge collectors’, i.e. people who stayed long enough to earn ‘the badge’ before moving on to another team to do the same thing, purely for the ‘bragging rights’.



**Fig 4.3 The QuakeRescue commitment**

- Being a team player, supporting and building your 'friends' and team to achieving their objectives
- Attend a weekend of training every month Friday evening to Sunday afternoon
- Support the development of the teams objectives in some of your free time
- Actively fundraise to allow the team to train, deliver projects within the UK and abroad and respond to disasters.
- Help manage the team by using any specialist knowledge you have in other fields of work
- Be happy when tired, miserable, cold and wet
- Be happy when relaxing with your team over a few drinks

In May 2014, 20 successful IRT recruits (16 males, 4 females), myself included, commenced the two year training programme that included classroom based learning, the maintenance and practical use of technical search and rescue equipment, SWAH, USAR techniques, dynamic risk assessments, casualty handling, breaking and breaching, propping and shoring, types of collapse and BOO<sup>6</sup> set up. Learning was consolidated in a variety of rescue scenario exercises, in locations ranging from construction sites and derelict buildings, to fast-flowing rivers. The training was designed to prepare the volunteers for a real mission in response to a natural disaster and by necessity involved minimal sleep, eating ration packs, and operating from a base camp in all weather conditions. Six trainees dropped out over the course of the programme, for various reasons including family and work pressures that made their ongoing commitment to the training unsustainable.

In the meantime, there was no progress or information about the formalisation of the merger. In research interviews conducted between July and October 2014 some participants mentioned their concerns about a lack of strategic direction and a distrust in the new Board of Trustees, *'Who are the board? Why haven't we met*

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<sup>6</sup> Base of Operations – a temporary co-ordination centre for the duration of a training exercise or mission.

*them?* (#1). There were also rumours that 'QuakeRescue Ltd' were holding on to a considerable amount of funding that was not being released into the operational part of the organization, i.e. IRT and CRT. QuakeRescue Ltd were also criticised for delaying the merger because of a reticence to take on the potential liabilities of the charity. In March 2015, due to a shortage of funds, QuakeRescue headquarters was relocated to a storage unit on the site of a Fire Service station in Wiltshire. The new unit was uninsulated and had no office, kitchen or bathroom, although the Fire Service occasionally allowed access to their facilities.

In April 2015, a team of eight IRT members deployed from the new headquarters to the Nepal earthquake, with half a tonne of equipment that allowed for light rescue, UAV<sup>7</sup> reconnaissance and water filtration of up to 8000 litres per day. The team carried out immediate search and rescue in Kathmandu, surveying and searching in very remote rural villages, training and capacity building with locals, as well as working closely with the British Gurkhas in Nepal. Those volunteers who did not deploy instead manned the 24-hour Operations Control Room or took advantage of local and national media coverage to collect donations at a variety of events and venues. The undercurrent of discontent surfaced during the mission. I was assisting with fundraising as the deployed team arrived back and were reunited with their families and were being sheltered from the ferocious attention of the media. The Chairman of Board arrived and demanded to know why there had been no press coverage of the teams return. The team were exhausted and had not wanted the press intrusion, and also wished to shield many seriously injured military personnel with whom they had flown back to UK. The Operations Control Room Commander, emotionally and physically exhausted from overseeing the extraction and safe return of the team for the previous 36 hours, was visibly annoyed and later expressed her frustration with the Board's interference in the management of the mission over the entire week. She described what she felt were their unreasonable requests, which were underpinned by a lack of appreciation or knowledge of the operational and command control aspects of a disaster response mission. The newly employed PR/fundraising employee, who also had no prior mission experience, had also added unnecessary layers of bureaucracy and disagreements over press releases, further complicating the work of the Operations Command team.

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<sup>7</sup> Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, commonly known as a drone.

A week later, at the usual monthly training weekend, a number of IRT members were vocal in their criticism of the Board who they felt were putting needless obstacles in the way of progress, '*QuakeRescue is succeeding in spite of them and not because of them*', (#11) and expressed a personal dislike of one of the Board members in particular, '*(name of trustee) is a dick*'. Another IRT member, who had deployed to Nepal, was under the impression that the Chair of Trustees (a multi-millionaire) had been claiming petrol expenses for his visits to Headquarters. This was particularly galling given that volunteers receive no expense payments and several of those who had deployed to Nepal had suffered loss of earnings and other expenses, which participant 23 estimated as £800 for himself alone. He suggested that the Board's involvement with the charity was to be able to '*brag in their gentlemen's clubs in London*'. His disquiet was such that at the AGM to be held a few weeks later, he intended to propose that the IRT remained separate and not go ahead with intended merger with QuakeRescue Ltd.

At the AGM in June 2015, the Board of Trustees were conspicuously absent. Jack Hammer spent much of the time placating the members and reassuring them, '*I won't let it go*', promising that he would protect IRT's history, values and identity in a future merged QuakeRescue. In recognition of the members concerns, an experienced and well-respected IRT team member was unanimously voted to the position of 'Members Representative to the Board' in order to provide an additional voice for the membership at future Board meetings. Over the remainder of 2015, the training programme for the new cohort of IRT members continued and included breaking and breaching at a partly demolished building in Gloucestershire and swift water training in Wiltshire. For the first time in many years, the annual IRT Christmas party, usually organised by Sam Sparkes, did not take place and in hindsight was perhaps a sign of continuing discontent. In March 2016, Sam, who had been 'second-in-command' to Billy Blazes for over a decade, resigned from QuakeRescue.

In April 2016, the remaining 14 IRT trainees (13 males and myself) completed their training programme and took part in a final five day assessment in order to become operationally deployable. The 'fake quake scenario' repeatedly tested volunteers on all aspects of the training programme and included the team being held at 'gunpoint' at a hostile border crossing, interrogations by real immigration control staff, extended rescue scenarios involving many hours of tunnelling in a collapsed structure, with members of the armed forces acting as screaming casualties and

distressed relatives to add to the pressure and reality of the situation. Each trainee was carefully observed, monitored and assessed throughout the entire process, and later received detailed feedback on their performance. Despite completing the two year training programme and the final assessment, two of the trainees were deemed to have 'failed' and subsequently left QuakeRescue. The majority of the remaining 12 trainees had development areas that required additional training over the following six months, but despite having completed the supplementary training, many had not been 'signed off' for international deployments or received their 'badge' by the end of 2016 as promised.

At the AGM in June 2016, following this advice from Jack Hammer:

*'QuakeRescue is called a members charity, mainly suitable for small charities with few members. This type of charity is no longer recommended as the trustees remain personally liable for all risks including health and safety and financial risks. The legal advice we have received recommend we change to a different charity type as soon as possible' (email 31 May 16)*

the members voted by a majority to merge with QuakeRescue Ltd, in effect giving up their voting rights and handing control to the Trustees. Two months after the AGM, a 'Volunteer Agreement' was sent to all members, which formalised both QuakeRescue and members commitment to each other, set down a requirement to attend a minimum of six training weekends per year (post initial training/assessment) as well as a declaration confirming that volunteers had obtained the understanding and agreement of their families and employers in anticipation of future deployments. This was accompanied by a 'Members Handbook' that contained organizational policies including Accident Reporting, Data Protection, Discipline and Dignity at Work, and indicated perhaps the beginning of more formal organizational control.

#### **4.6 Summary**

The aim of this chapter has been to introduce the organization at the centre of my research, in terms of its history, structure, volunteer member teams and some of the key events that happened over the course of the study. Given the nature of the work, the level of commitment required by QuakeRescue members is quite unlike most other forms of volunteering. Despite the turbulent times described above and an uncertain future, the members by and large, remained fiercely loyal to their leaders, Jack Hammer and Billy Blazes. The volunteers' accounts of the trials and

tribulations of being a QuakeRescue member are set out in the next three data chapters, as are my own experiences, as I am also a fully trained member of QuakeRescue IRT.

## **5. SEARCHING AND RESCUING SELVES**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this first of three chapters of data analysis, the specific focus is on how volunteer identity is constructed and the discourses that are central to the development of 'volunteer' identity. This study contributes to the call to investigate volunteers from different theoretical perspectives in order to gain a 'deeper insight' (Rochester et al, 2009). The dominant view of volunteering is as an altruistic activity whereby individuals give their time for the benefit of others (Rochester et al, 2009). However, the purpose of this chapter is to challenge this argument and demonstrate that volunteering may be far from being completely (if at all) altruistic as the data indicated that in this particular case, the purpose of 'Search and Rescue' appeared to be more about the individual members search for meaning, and being rescued by the volunteer organization in a variety of ways. This reinforces the notion that 'Good Samaritan' ideals that appear altruistic, are not (Lacan, 1980). My key argument is that in attempting to secure their selves or to compensate for a 'lack' elsewhere, it is almost as if the organization existed more for the members, than the recipients or beneficiaries of the voluntary work.

The analysis of data identified two distinct but overlapping themes. The first theme, '*Searching for Meaning*' is concerned with the significance participants attached to volunteering, and multiple data extracts are presented that demonstrate that volunteering is often undertaken for personal benefit, a search for meaning or purpose in the volunteers lives, in order to fill a gap, or as atonement for a past experience or event. These are attempts to sustain their present lives or secure their future selves. Theme two, '*Rescuing Selves*', is concerned with how individuals attempted to secure themselves through their membership with this organization. There are two subsections; the first is concerned with the participants' attraction to volunteering and their inspiration for joining, and the second centres on their experience of joining and the ways in which this influenced their endeavours to rescue themselves.

### **5.2 Searching for Meaning**

In this first theme multiple extracts are presented that demonstrate how volunteering was often undertaken for personal benefit, as a search for meaning or purpose in the volunteers lives, in order to fill a gap, in atonement for a past experience or event, or to ascribe some sense of a stable or secure future self. The participants

spoke honestly about the personal benefits they derived from volunteering with several reflecting that the organization almost seemed to exist as much, if not more, for the benefit of the members rather than the notional beneficiaries. Throughout the interviews what I might have expected to be a grand narrative of helping others or making a difference seemed to be constructed only as a peripheral outcome of volunteering. In many of the participants' accounts of volunteering, helping others was not mentioned until this was directly raised by the researcher towards the end of the interview.

### 5.2.1 Helping others or helping ourselves?

Many of the participants described a variety of personal benefits that come from volunteering:

*'...people do it for all sorts of different reasons as well. Some people might do this because they like being 'Action Men'. I'm about as far removed from Action Man as you can get, and some people might be doing it entirely altruistically, ... and some people might just be out for whatever they can get out of it but I should think most of us are a blend of the two. So yeah, it takes, there's all sorts of volunteering, and it's all got its merits and I should think that what we all want is a bit of a warm and fuzzy (feeling) because we've done something for someone else, that you didn't have to do' (#21).*

The participant expressed the feeling of satisfaction that volunteers often experience as a result of helping others. Not surprisingly perhaps, this 'feel good factor' is intensified for others who had made live rescues in the aftermath of an earthquake, *'we went to Pakistan and did the first rescues there, that was an awesome feeling ... the adrenalin rush, the whole thing was like 'my God, this is fantastic'. So, it makes you feel great about yourself' (#18).* Interestingly, the total devastation of the earthquake with hundreds of dead and injured is not mentioned, and rather than talking about the humanitarian disaster he witnessed, the experience is described in terms centred on the 'fantastic' personal benefits to the participant.

Another participant articulated some of the benefits he felt from volunteering, including a sense of belonging, purpose, and direction:

*'...they (volunteers) need something extra to help them focus, ground them, make them feel part of something again, make them feel important, just part of something really and I just think from my own*

*personal experiences and how much it's done for me, I think there's lots more people who would really benefit from it' (#16).*

Participation in volunteering activities were arguably described in terms of narcissistic self-aggrandizement, fulfilling a need or desire to feel important and to achieve great things (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008; Brown, 1997). This was by no means the only instance where participants seemed to view helping beneficiaries as incidental:

*'I didn't feel a calling, I didn't have an epiphany, I didn't cross a Rubicon or any other cliché that you care for, I wanted to do something, if you like the last throw of the dice, midlife crisis whatever you want to call it, it's better than a motorbike, and if some good comes of it then good' (#21).*

A preoccupation with self is highlighted here for the participant's desire to volunteer is explained as a way of dealing with an existential concern to have purpose or meaning at this stage in his life. Other participants also spoke openly of the personal benefits, self-motivations and lack of altruism in their voluntary activities, *'Coming here, I don't view as volunteering, I think I get (benefit) out of this. I don't view this as something altruistic or anything. I believe I fully gain from this' (#37)*, and it is also suggested that the absence of altruism was not important so long as the volunteering benefits others as well as oneself:

*'If you're helping you're helping. It doesn't matter why you're helping, if you're benefiting somebody, then great. If you're also benefiting your own ego then that's ok ... it's positive, absolutely nothing wrong with it' (#47).*

By contrast there were some participants who felt that selflessly helping others held deeper meaning and purpose. Individuals who felt they volunteered for more altruistic reasons, described a greater sense of satisfaction and an even greater gain or personal benefit:

*'...you get more out of doing this work when you're not doing it for yourself, you yourself get more out of it, so selfless commitment it's very good for the self, and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. People will always argue that there's no such thing as a truly selfless act, but you can certainly be selfish' (#15).*

This account emphasises Derridian notions of the impossibility of gift-giving, that unless given completely anonymously such acts are seldom free of some kind of reciprocation or reward for the donor. Ironically, the participant contradicted his



claim of being selfless by describing the 'symbolic recognition' he gained from volunteering (Derrida, 1992). For another participant the idealised illusion of himself as a selfless giver resulted in an ongoing endeavour to do more in order to repay, or multiply, the benefits he received:

*'...it's a brilliant thing, to give yourself to helping other people and for that to be the reason, not to gain something or to do, just for that to be the reason, that is just fantastic and very, very quickly you'll realise 'bloody hell, I'm getting more out of this than I'm putting in, I'd better try and do something else' (#11).*

Participant 11 suggested that the reciprocation he received only served to increase his volunteering efforts in an unachievable quest to secure a self-sacrificing version of himself (Lacan, 1980). As I show in the next section, the search for meaning or purpose derived from volunteering was also described as originating from a gap or lack in the participants' lives.

### **5.2.2 Filling a gap**

The need to fill a perceived 'gap' in the daily lives of the volunteers was a prominent theme in the data. Participants accounts centred on two areas: failure in, or transition from military careers; and disillusionment or dissatisfaction with what they deemed as their unfulfilling corporate jobs. The next four extracts are from ex-forces personnel and illustrate how 'previous' identities entangled with the military were a continuing source of insecurity, and remained difficult to move on from for a variety of reasons. This participant, who successfully completed initial training and had a short career in the Armed Forces, described a lingering sense of not having fulfilled his potential, or achieved his career ambitions during his service:

*'There's some slightly immature 'want' to go out and sort of experience a bit of the danger and that, or whether actually that's the guilt that I didn't feel like I actually took my share of the risk whilst I was in the military? Now that's, that's sort of something I'm conscious of, I don't think it's my driving factor and I would be pretty, I think it would be a pretty crap reason and a bit neurotic to do it, but, I do feel like, my military career didn't, I didn't quite have the impact I wanted to and that there's still an opportunity to go and do some great works, or whatever, or do something you feel really proud of...' (#2).*

In this example, as well as not achieving his aspiration of a distinguished military career this participant draws from discourses of masculinity in revealing how he wants to 'prove' himself, and is endeavouring to repair this lack through future possible 'heroic' or risky acts. However he is also aware that there is a

contradiction; in attempting to secure himself in this way he is also vulnerable to accusations of (weak) neuroticism that could potentially undermine any claims to 'feeling proud'. Another long-serving veteran constructed himself as actively seeking a replacement for many years of active duty in war zones in the military:

*'....that's the reason why I joined (previous rescue team) in the first place; I just had this 'gap'. Some people, don't get me wrong, I know, sometimes I do feel guilty about this, some people say 'I do this because I want to make a difference'. I do like to make a difference, but I must admit from a personal point of view it's...it's like I'm trying to fill something – a gap in my life that I can't, that this seems to be the only way I can fill it' (#18).*

He had, he said, struggled to fill this void in civilian life and was reportedly uncomfortable (*I do feel guilty*) since his volunteering was disclosed to be a self-centred endeavour rather than being altruistically driven. The transition from the Armed Forces, a 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961) was an ongoing source of insecurity, as observed by another ex-military participant:

*'I went from the military into the city, working with all sorts of people from very different walks of life to me, and it took me a very long time to realise what you can get away with, what you can't get away with, where the lines are. And here, there are no lines, which is kind of how I like it' (#36).*

He described feelings akin to being an 'imposter' and not knowing or understanding the 'rules' or cultural norms in a civilian workplace. However, volunteering in QuakeRescue was more familiar, not least because of the presence of other military veterans, and a place where, unlike his new career, he did not face a struggle for credibility (Knights & Clarke, 2014). Identities relating to being ex-military were very powerful and left a lacuna, that for some were never fully replaced, as observed by another veteran:

*'... the other interesting thing is with the military people all trying not to talk that much about it, but actually desperate to talk about it because they don't get to talk about it to anybody else, so, and also the fact that all the military people are veterans, so not in the military anymore, so they've kind of got to deal with their status anxiety of the fact that that's all in the past' (#14).*

These past identities were preferred over present versions of self, and volunteering was described as a means of sustaining or affirming aspects of previous 'treasured' identities (Brown & Phua, 2011) that had no equivalence for these participants.

### 5.2.3 Self-affirmation

For some individuals, testing their physical and mental limits and proving themselves to others was a significant source of self-validation. This was summed up in the description of an ex-military participant's account of his selection weekend experience:

*'.. using some skills that I hadn't used for quite a while, re-engaging with that side of me, I think it's probably quite a lot of internal validation, so remembering how you used to be able to work in certain scenarios, and getting I suppose a bit of a buzz from that, being challenged .... but also proving, a lot of it is about proving things to yourself or to other people, just that I can still do this stuff' (#3).*

This description strikes a chord with stereotypical notions of masculinity, of testing and proving oneself in a series of challenges in order to defend or sustain a preferred self-image. Furthermore past military identities were still desired and important for some participant's present selves and there was considerable emotion attached to this self-affirmation exercise:

*'...after all that time in training could I, could I lead? Could I physically put myself in harm's way and operate and function? And thankfully, I could. And I'm enormously proud of the fact that I can, so yes' (#13).*

Not only did he talk of being proud but also grateful that he could still perform in this desired way, the alternative being much less favourable, although attempting to secure himself in this way may be considered self-defeating as identity can only be secured in the moment. Other participants also constructed themselves in ways that suggested a fear of losing their former selves despite no longer being serving members of the Armed Forces, *'it just kind of re-instilled what I thought I already had but I kind of thought I'd lost in coming out because again, you become quite soft in civilian life' (#12)*. This extract is from a female, for whom a 'positive' identity was stereotypically masculine, associated with physical toughness, personal and mental resilience and one that is more attractive than that of a 'soft' civilian (Dutton et al, 2010).

Whilst the examples above are all from ex-military volunteers, the need for self-validation was not entirely exclusive to them, as another participant explained: *'It's a kind of measure, you sort of measure yourself, don't you, against challenges. If I wouldn't, if I didn't want to challenge myself then I wouldn't have put myself in this position'* (#21). There is a narcissistic concern about securing the self through achievement, self-mastery and the conquering of personal fears in order to test and appraise oneself. The 'challenge' was described as important in the pursuit of the 'feel good factor' and attempting to secure a masculine identity:

*'The more you challenge yourself the better when you come out of it and look back and think 'I did that', that feels good. The urban search and rescue stuff, we did in very confined spaces working through the night, again, I was in spaces that I thought that I would feel very uncomfortable in, but I just got on with it and it didn't bother me at all. And, but you come out and you see what you've done, and you think 'Yeah, that was good!'* (#32).

But constant proving and improving of oneself is always self-defeating and can never be a solution. However, as the next section highlights, for some the need for self-validation and challenge was expressed as deriving from a disenchantment or disappointment in their current occupations, rather than previous ones.

#### **5.2.4 Disillusionment and dissatisfaction with day job**

Several participants constructed volunteering as providing meaning or a sense of purpose, in stark contrast to the disillusionment or dissatisfaction they said they felt in their normal occupations. In the following examples the participants described disenchantment, a feeling of pretence and an experience of tediousness in their everyday working lives. The following extract is taken from an email sent to me by a participant a few days after his research interview:

**08 October 2014**

*...I enjoyed being interviewed. It gave me a chance to express what I've been thinking for a while.*

*I am currently sat at work, hot-desking, working out how to articulate something complex into as simple and visually pleasing a picture as possible. I am drinking a luke-warm coffee that has come out of a machine and contemplating lunch, which will be eaten at my desk. I have no idea if I will be here for the next two days, or if I will have to travel. I have my headphones on, and I am staring into my lap top, my own little world of work, conjured up in my head, where I spend about ten hours of the day...*

*My job can be described as sitting an exam every day, on a subject I know nothing about, written in a language I don't speak, for people who don't understand the answer. I've concluded it's a game and best approached that way.*

*So that's why I like QuakeRescue and like the idea of volunteering. It 'feels' real, unlike the world of work, which in some respects could not be more fake. (#14)*

The tensions described in his working life resulted in an anxiety of being an 'imposter,' someone who did not understand the 'game' but nevertheless recognised the significance of playing it. The game is an illusion (Bourdieu, 1990), so he constructed an alternative (volunteering) identity, which could, on the surface, fill the void. The futility and pretence of his day job was portrayed in complete contrast to his volunteering experiences, which he constructed as 'real' and meaningful. The pointlessness of work was echoed by another participant:

*'Right now, half the problem I have in my job is, it doesn't make a difference to anyone. And...it doesn't matter to anyone. It doesn't matter to even them. They sometimes ignore what we do despite paying us hundreds of thousands of pounds to do it. So, you know, you're just making no impact on the planet whatsoever' (#36).*

His work was constructed in nihilistic terms, as ultimately meaningless and lacking purpose. Pessimism and scepticism about his job caused existential insecurities, that his life had no intrinsic value or enduring legacy. Volunteering was a means to elevate and secure oneself, to escape from the present and deny one's immortality (Becker, 1973). Preoccupation with the self and their 'limitless concern about identity' was not so much focused on the volunteering itself, but rather being the one doing it (Ekman, 2013, p. 1176).

The two previous extracts are from ex-military personnel who left the service either through redundancy or by their own choice, and who expressed their struggle to transition into 'Civvie Street', leaving behind identities crafted during their time in the military. Nevertheless the data identified that disenchantment or monotony in their day job was not exclusive to volunteers who had served in the Armed Forces. In the next example, a participant expressed a degree of disillusionment in his current employment within the Emergency Services, where volunteering is described in terms of being more rewarding and uplifting than his day job:

*'it's quite similar in the way that we... offer to help people, humanitarian services, and helping people in times of need, and possibly rescuing people as well, just like the Fire Service does, but it just... it's a different group of people, in the way that there's never any problems, there's always solutions, it's quite refreshing. There's a lot of doom and gloom in the Fire Service at the moment, like any public service I think. So, to come here and it's really refreshing to have a different kind of attitude. A lot of people do come from the Fire Service or the NHS and they come here and they leave all that behind them, it's like doing the same job but better' (#26).*

Arguably, there are notions of escapism in this extract, of the participant seeking distraction and relief from his unpleasant everyday working life by engaging in an enjoyable 'idealised' life outside of the 'public sector'. The participant constructed QuakeRescue as an organization without the despair and constraints he encountered in his day job. However, this appeared to be in contrast to my own observations and the accounts of many other research participants who spoke of their frustration with a lack of funding, resources and equipment, constant pressure to fund-raise, tensions between the newly appointed board and its membership and other inter-personal conflicts.

Escapism and distraction from his everyday life was also mentioned by a volunteer with no previous military or emergency services background. He described how he had attended the selection weekend in order to support a friend who wished to become a SAR volunteer:

*'... initially ... I came here to help, to enable someone (else). I started doing it and the more I got in I realised how much I'd missed this, this sense of extremity in my life. Because I ...had a very extreme kind of life when I was younger, and then I had this whole kind of conformist awful office life that I can't cope with because it's too safe and comfortable, so getting a taste of that extremity, I thought 'Fuck! I've missed this! I feel alive again!'* (#37).

This participant constructed his work as boring and mundane, with no adrenaline, danger or risk, and somewhere he had to 'obey the rules'. His membership of QuakeRescue provided the intensity of 'thick volunteering' (O'Toole & Grey, 2016) and the opportunity to strive towards an idealised version of himself that was lacking in his working life. Ironically, because of the nature of this kind of 'high stakes volunteering' (McNamee & Peterson, 2016) there were many elements that, not unlike his work, required conformity and adherence to stringent conditions in relation to behaviour, professionalism, preparedness and personal kit. In many accounts, participants disregarded or at least did not verbally register these inconvenient

truths, rather the meaning of volunteering was expressed in contrast to a disenchantment with their daily working lives; however for others volunteering was linked to a need to make reparation for experiences from both their working and/or personal lives.

### 5.2.5 Atonement

The analysis of the data highlights a temporal element attached to many of the individual's constructions of the meaning of volunteering. Several of the participants spoke of a need or desire to make amends for *past* events, to sustain their *present* day lives and as a means to secure their *future* ideal or ought selves (Albert, 1977; Higgins, 1987). In the next extract, a participant reflects on whether his attraction to this particular type of volunteering work is a way of exorcising hangovers from the military:

*'I think maybe in (war zone), maybe there was a thing there because we never got to achieve what we were supposed to achieve. Yeah and I don't know whether some of that's played into it and I'm still trying to fill that failure.... we did a lot of work with orphanages as well and, but you couldn't really change anything and, so you did end up with a massive, I think, quite a sense of guilt to be honest when you went home, because you left it all behind and I don't know whether I'm trying to sort of make up for that, I don't know' (#18).*

Here, the blame for traumatic events, which would have been beyond his control, was individualised and volunteering was described as providing a way to absolve his lingering sense of guilt and failure. Once again powerful military experiences and the anxieties attached to them were expressed as being difficult to shake off, and remained central discourses in the participant's accounts of self and volunteering.

Another participant reported that there was a sense of needing to repair perceived misdemeanours in his past:

*'I wasn't the nicest or best kid growing up, well, I wasn't bad, but I wasn't good shall we say, and now I'm at that stage of life where I can afford to give some time and I can afford to spend some money helping other people. So, I think it's about time I gave back as I've been doing a lot of taking for the first part of my life – maybe it's time to do it the other way around'(#47).*

His participation in volunteering was expressed within an altruistic discourse as a positive, rather than being solely driven by a need for reparation, but volunteering

provided a resource for a 'redemption narrative of self-renewal' (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) and the fostering of a better future identity (Bruner, 1990). However, for some the quest to make amends was not a result of past experiences, but a way of easing their consciences for their current rather privileged lives. This was summed up in one participant's recollection of a discussion with other members:

*'....there is that ultimate desire to have some positive effect, and again I think a lot of people's daily lives, they may struggle to see that positive effect, and so what's really interesting is, a number of the guys who work in London, ... especially a lot of the ex forces guys, by their own admission, they've sold their souls to get lots of money and they see this as a way of almost atoning for that..... and so, I think, for them they see it as really good balance to strike between something that is maybe a bit more, I don't know, self-indulgent is probably not the word, ..... it's something that's more spiritually rewarding, ...I think people do see it as a leveler, in many ways' (#3).*

This suggests that voluntary work provided some participants with virtuous or moral recompense for the desire for wealth that attracted them to elite jobs in the city. Gift-giving or donating money may be a means of 'atoning for sins' (Schwartz, 1967) however volunteering was expressed as a more self-serving way of constructing oneself as a self-sacrificing and praiseworthy individual. In contrast, another participant attempted to describe his intentions as being driven only for altruism:

*'I just thought well it's actually it's one thing I can actually put my hand up and say I'm giving something back to life that I've got no, I've got no gain from it whatsoever and that made me feel good' (#5).*

However it could be argued that the good feeling he described is in itself a personal gain that provided him with a sense of being a 'moral' person (Watson, 2009). This, together with his self-praise for not benefiting from volunteering arguably reinforces Derridian ideas of the impossibility of gift giving (Derrida, 1992). Contradictions appeared later in the interview when he recalled how, despite being 40+ years old, the training and selection process had '*proved to me that actually....I can, I can still do stuff*' thus protecting himself from being 'past it', still youthful and physically capable, to postpone feelings of finitude (Becker, 1973). At the end of the interview he also explained how being able to (potentially) rescue someone offered an opportunity to secure his future self:



*'I'd feel, because obviously I'm a Catholic as well, so I'd feel quite, you know, that's one for that token jar up there as well, you know what I mean, and my token jar up there is getting big, so I'd be quite happy with that (laughs)' (#5).*

The metaphor of 'a token jar' creates the notion of some form of exchange attached to volunteering or 'good deeds earn chits' (Godfrey, 2005, p. 777). Doing a good deed in the present (saving a life) can provide future rewards for this participant, in this case a place in Heaven, or a 'quid for a more implicit and conjectured quo' (Phelps, 1975, p. 2). Volunteering was not concerned with atoning for the past, but instead was a transaction for the future, or a 'deferred, self-interested investment' (Maclean et al 2015, p. 1627).

All these examples indicated that volunteering provided an important source of meaning and purpose in the volunteers' lives, intrinsically linked in different guises to the construction of their identities. In the final extract in this section, a participant summarised the nuanced ways in which volunteering is a central resource that could stave off nihilism or existential insecurities:

*'I've always felt the need to do something. It's just about being more than just 'me'. Yeah, it's not like I need, but it is a need, almost like a calling, you've got to be doing something of value because otherwise your life is meaningless to a certain extent.....so it's kind of self-worth and the need to be, the need for existence, that sounds really dramatic... I've got to make sense of the time that I've got remaining, so let's make sense of it by doing something useful' (#19).*

This preoccupation with the self is a self-defeating means of allaying death (Becker, 1973), which this participant expressed in his need to make the most of his remaining time by having a sense of purpose, and this purpose is constructed in almost messianic ways, *'almost like a calling'* (#19).

### **5.3 Rescuing selves**

The focus in this second theme is how individuals attempt to secure themselves through their membership in this organization. This section has two main themes, the first is concerned with what they say is their attraction to volunteering and inspiration for joining, and the second centres on their experience of the selection and training processes and how these influence their endeavours to secure, or 'rescue' themselves.

When asked what attracted them to apply for this type of voluntary work, there were a variety of responses. Some participants were moved to act after watching footage of the aftermath of a disaster on television, but said they felt a need to do more than just make a donation to a relief fund. For others it was an extension of their professional lives or an interest in the subject of Disaster Management. Several were inspired and actively encouraged to apply by existing members, in particular Billy Blazes, who they met through work or social settings. Only a small number of participants suggested they joined for networking and career purposes, but nonetheless there were three recurring themes; 'born rescuers', adventure and challenge, and the opportunity to learn new skills or develop themselves in unexpected ways.

### **5.3.1. Born rescuers**

Several participants constructed their SAR volunteering in essentialist terms, as an unchangeable part of their nature over which they had little choice, as this participant explained:

*'For me, I think, in the reading that I'd done, there is something called the 'rescue personality'. I think there are people around that will always stand in front of the bullet. They're built in such a way that if someone needs help, they will always offer it, even at risk to themselves. So I think there is that type of characteristic inbuilt, probably more in men than there are in women, and I happen to be one of those....I think it's inbuilt, and I can't avoid it...that's why I say to you, I'm that type of character that is just built that way, it's actually not a conscious decision, I have no control over it. So I'll always volunteer, whether it's for some bonkers organization that goes to disasters and puts yourself at risk, or in another way, I think I'll always do it' (#22).*

The participant constructed being a rescuer as an intrinsic 'way of being' (Coupland 2015, p. 12). This was offered as an explanation for his desire to do this type of work and perhaps as justification to others for putting himself into risky situations. In contrast to earlier descriptions of volunteering, there was more concern with helping or being of service to others, as this participant also explained: *'I am a volunteer in terms of my mentality and my persona, I like to help where things need doing. Yes I think my underlying personality is one that, of service' (#13).* This participant also described himself as possessing a 'true' self in ways that are not uncommon in the narrative accounts of research participants (Watson, 2008). This was highlighted in another extract where the participant also described his desire to help others as comprising a fundamental part of his character:

*'... and helping people when they're upset and that, so that must just be in your make-up or in your upbringing before you're conscious of it, whenever that happens' '(my wife) knows it's part of who I am, and I probably would be miserable if I was not going to help when people need it'(#15).*

Although he constructed himself as being concerned with helping people, helping is arguably another form of self-gratification and feeling good about oneself and authoring a particular type of identity (Derrida, 1992). Furthermore this participant suggested that not volunteering or helping others would result in an unhappy and unsatisfied 'alternate' self and was perhaps also a justification to his family for his ongoing commitment (Obodaru, 2012). However, in all of these examples, volunteering was considered almost as a 'life calling' where an alternative self did not exist, could not be imagined and was undesirable (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006). By contrast there were other participants who described volunteering in less earnest terms, as providing an opportunity for adventure and challenge.

### **5.3.2 Adventure and challenge**

The theme of preoccupation with self continued in this section, as some participants described the ways in which this kind of voluntary work satisfied a need that their normal employment, or other types of volunteering, did not:

*'It's more about action and adventure, helping the notional gentleman or elderly lady out of a difficult situation, which I haven't actually got involved with yet... I think that ticks more my adventure box' (#30).*

The risky nature of search and rescue work was described as attractive by some participants, particularly those who enjoyed extreme, adrenaline fuelled pastimes, *'I do a lot of sport or I did a lot of sport, adventure sports that sort of thing and felt that the slightly more risky nature of the business, if you like, was quite appealing as well' (#44).* Engaging in dangerous activities may be a way of proving oneself as a 'full fledged man' to others (Haas, 1974, p. 107), and the same participant also described how the physical aspect of the SAR work itself was particularly desirable:

*'I guess it's a bit more of a challenge, physical challenge, I've always been, done adventurous things and being able to combine that with trying to contribute back into, put something back into the world as it were, seemed like a good thing for me' (#44).*

Physically testing and proving oneself is an important enactment of stereotypically understood masculinity (e.g. Coupland, 2015), but for many the attraction was not

only in the adventure and excitement of the training, but the potential to use the training in action by being deployed to an earthquake or flood. A participant described how during the application process he had seen the team on television, making live rescues in an earthquake, and doing it 'for real', which he saw as significant: *'wow, look, that's it, they do **do** this stuff and they are there first, making a difference, it's not just an adventure club, it's real' (#15)* . However deployments to earthquakes in the recent past had been five years apart, Haiti in 2010 and Nepal in 2015, and as another participant explained, as exciting and challenging as the training may be, the ultimate test or proving of oneself is by going on a 'mission':

*'I imagine all the IRT members are kind of frantically thinking when's the next earthquake gonna come? Not because they want thousands of people to die but that's what they joined for... cos you don't want it just to be a camping club do you? I certainly don't want it just to be a camping club where you go away once a month and have a good time, drink some beer. That's fun in its own right...'* (#19).

Many of the participants said they did not regard SAR training as a leisure activity or a game, but that there had to be some tangible 'output' or experience from their volunteering. Without a deployment the need for training and becoming a search and rescue volunteer would be meaningless, and would bring into question the altruistic purpose of QuakeRescue.

### **5.3.3 Learning new skills**

In contrast to the examples above, some participants said they were drawn to join QuakeRescue for the opportunity to gain new knowledge and learn different technical skills, rather than adventure or excitement:

*'What I also like is the technical aspect of what we do...so working with ropes, doing knots, having a lot of equipment that also needs looking after, but you need to know how to use, to use it safely and efficiently. In my job I do (manual) work and that's not nearly as complex. I just quite like complex, technical work'* (#30).

Another participant considered the chance to learn new skills as a way of protecting his future and a desire to be prepared for potential difficulties that may arise:

*'I'm quite, in a kind of weird way, into like being prepared for stuff, including like, I think there's value in having life skills that are kind of diverse. So I didn't want to be the person that only knows IT, only knows how to do programming and only does stuff like that.... I think it's the same as putting all your eggs in one basket, so I wanted to learn like*

*some medical skills, I wanted to learn some sort of general life skills like, maybe sort of practical skills, like carpentry, stuff like that, so that if anything really weird happened in my life that I couldn't predict, then I'd be more flexible, I'd kind of have more options... I kind of wanted to have more skills than just IT in order to fall back on. Just in case' (#6).*

This desire to acquire new skills was constructed alongside a discourse of wanting to be 'more' than he was at present, working on a future self as he was not satisfied with having intellectual or specialist expertise but craved more stereotypical male capabilities, such as practical craft skills or (heroic) competence in emergency situations. Another participant employed in the Emergency Services described how this voluntary work enabled him to maintain skills he was concerned about losing in his day job:

*'There was loads of talk about us losing skills, which is skills I enjoy, he (Billy Blazes) said, 'If you want to try and keep hold of them, why don't you come and join QuakeRescue? It'd be a chance to keep your skills maintained, learn something new. We need people to join'. And I was like, 'Perfect'. I wanted to do it for ages, never really knew how to approach it, and so that was a chance of doing really. So for me, it was maintaining skills as well' (#25).*

The endeavour to acquire new skills or the protection of existing capabilities was described as a significant reason for joining as well as adventure or a calling for rescue work. QuakeRescue was depicted by the participants as a site where they may be able to 'actualize personal potential' by indulging a passion for rescue work, by being challenged and developed, or by finding some meaningful purpose in their lives (Ekman, 2013, p. 1167).

In the next section, the focus shifts to the participants' experiences of joining and passing the intense selection process and how this provided a means with which to (attempt to) secure themselves.

#### **5.3.4 Joining up**

Joining is a lengthy process that begins with a 36 hour intensive selection weekend, involving orienteering, abseiling, simulated rescue exercises and casualty-laden stretchers carried over long distances and heavy terrain. The entire weekend is deliberately designed to be challenging in order to test an individual's resilience and determination. The selection event in 2014 was publicised by the organization as follows:

*A gruelling 36 hours of disaster response based challenges. Little sleep, limited “food”, with personal and team challenges. Participants will be tested and assessed with the **prize** being selection to commence training with QuakeRescue IRT and Community Emergency Response Teams. Can you lead and follow, be part of a team, map read, plan, cook, clean, communicate, climb, crawl, carry? How are you at working with others, with heights, confined spaces, arduous conditions, sleep deprivation, coping under pressure? Do you have a sense of humour, personal drive and determination, and a will to succeed and see your team complete the task?*

*QuakeRescue – participant information document, 26/2/2014*

QuakeRescue portrayed the successful completion of the selection process in terms of a ‘reward’ for significant achievement and they also offer the opportunity to commence the training as one of great value. This impression of accolade and high worth was shared by some of the participants and is explored in detail later in this chapter.

By and large the participants said they had a realistic expectation of the physical and mental challenges that lay ahead for them: *‘I was sort of prepared to be cold and wet and knackered because obviously... they’re not going to sit you down for a hand of whist are they?’* (#21) and *‘....I’ve done selection things before and it’s a formula that is not well known as such but it’s a case of expect the unexpected and you’ll probably be about right.’* (#44) Nevertheless there were some unexpected challenges, such as the pace and intensity of the weekend: *‘... it felt like a selection from the off, so there was no kind of breaking into it, you were literally, you had to get your game-face on from the moment you started’* (#14). The phrase ‘game-face’ suggests how seriously some participants took the selection process and the need to present themselves in a certain favourable way (Goffman, 1959), while the supervisory staff performed their roles stringently in a deliberate effort to put the candidates under a degree of pressure:

*‘when I got there, you know when they check your bags for all of the kit, Sam Sparkes checked my bag and you know Sam can be a little bit militant and I was missing a whistle, that was the only thing I was missing, and he went nuts on me – ‘you’ve had two weeks to prepare, you’ve had this and you’ve had that, why didn’t you bring a whistle?’ obviously I now know it was just for the game, but at that time I felt really bad’* (#47).

Despite these being simulated events where the instructors put on a ‘show’, this

participant described a feeling of negative impact on himself. In contrast, other participants reported more positive experiences, not suffering such worries, and instead compared many of the weekend's activities to their preferred type of leisure pastimes:

*'I didn't find it that difficult, to be honest, compared to some of the others, because some people have never even been camping before, so a lot of what's involved in the Selection Weekend is something I'd choose to do as a hobby anyway. Maybe not push a tyre up a hill...'* (#23).

By constructing himself favourably in comparison to others, as more experienced and more capable in this situation, this participant is attempting to elevate himself through masculine discourses of strength and resilience. Similarly, another participant described the selection process in terms of fun or enjoyment, despite the hard work and physical challenges:

*'It was pretty fun, wasn't it? Don't get me wrong, it was hard work.....when you know there's an end game or there's an end time, you can just work towards it, if you like. Yeah, doing all that sort of thing, challenging yourself, pushing yourself further than you thought you could go, I love all that sort of stuff, I really do. I think it's great. Yeah, I had a lot of fun. I thought it was brilliant'* (#25).

Yet again, this participant constructed himself in terms of testing and proving himself in stereotypical masculine ways that were rational and unproblematic, but such attempts at securing oneself are self-defeating since identities rest on the confirmation of the other, who may or may not endorse them. That said, all of the study participants 'passed' the selection weekend, so perhaps it is not surprising that for most it was a constructive experience. By contrast, my own experience of selection was not fun, but filled with anxieties and personal challenges that are set out in Vignette 5.1 where I describe my experience of just one of the activities during that weekend.

### **Vignette 5.1 My worst nightmare**

**Sat 8 March 2014, 0100-0200 hrs, HQ Gloucester  
Blind obstacle & confined space challenge**

*This task was led by Operation Team members (Participant #34) and (Participant #43). I'm paired with Rocky<sup>8</sup>, given safety goggles that have been taped over so they're completely blacked out and so I can't see anything at all.*

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<sup>8</sup> Rocky was an unsuccessful candidate and not a study participant.

*I am to guide Rocky around a series of obstacles that have been constructed around the side of the HQ industrial unit by describing what I can feel, such as the shape of barriers and size of voids. Rocky places his hand on my right shoulder while #43 guides us to the side of the unit. I'm told to keep my left hand on the wire boundary fencing and my right hand on wall of Unit. When we are behind the Unit, my left hand is placed on a guide rope that I have to follow and I'm told to use my right hand in a sweeping motion in front of me and also to do the same with my feet so that I don't walk into or trip over obstructions. The guide rope quickly descends almost to ground level and my heart sinks as I feel an obstacle that clearly involves climbing into a confined space. I get down onto all fours, feeling the gap with my right hand and am horrified to realise that I am going to have to lie completely flat as there is only just enough clearance for my helmet to fit between the floor and the top of the obstacle. At this point I begin to unravel and hear myself saying 'I can't do this' and 'this is my worst nightmare' to which the Ops team task leaders tell me 'keep going, you'll be fine' and 'make like a worm'. Rocky, who now is also kneeling behind me and holding onto my right ankle, can obviously hear the panic in my voice and starts reassuring me, saying he is right there behind me, that he won't let go of me and we'll do this together. I take a deep breath and start to push my way into the hole – I put my head on one side because there isn't enough clearance for me to face forward. I wriggle and pull myself along, all the time telling Rocky what I can feel in front and all around me so that he can follow. There are a series of barriers, corrugated sheets that we scramble over and along, ladders on an incline and decline that we navigate precariously on hands and knees, with me describing and warning Rocky of various hazards and him still holding onto my ankle.*

*Half way round the course, the leaders ask us to swap so that Rocky is in the lead and I am guided by him. I hold onto Rocky's shoulder or ankle through various other obstacles and confined spaces, one of which feels really small and I begin to panic again, and say I'm scared, that I won't fit, that I'm going to get stuck. Rocky is already starting to squeeze into the hole and says 'If this fat bastard can get through... I'm pretty sure you can!' The fat bastard he was referring to was himself (he later told me he'd recently lost over 1.5 stone in weight and still had more to go) and our comparative size difference (I'm petite and weigh less than 8 stone). This makes me and the task leaders' laugh and I can't fault his logic, so I just follow him through the rest of the obstacles to the end – although there are times when I wish he would stop describing what was in front of him in so much detail and just hurry up so that I can get out as soon as possible.*

*At the end of the obstacle course, the task supervisors lead us into the Unit and we are allowed to remove our goggles. My panic is still evident – I lean on a countertop, legs trembling, heart racing, taking deep breaths in an attempt to compose myself. One of the leaders twice asks if I'm okay, acknowledging my struggle during that task. Rocky gives me a huge hug and congratulates me on getting through a challenge that I clearly had not enjoyed. However I don't feel elated, just a huge sense of relief that I'm out of the confined space and a total dread of what else is in store for the rest of the weekend.*

In contradiction to the participants' accounts, the vignette portrays a lack of concern for impression management and of being unafraid of revealing my anxieties to teammates and the instructors. Furthermore, unlike the participants' there was no



desire to prove or test myself, possibly because I did not conform to masculine norms at this stage of the study. This is discussed in more detail in the following data chapters.

### **5.3.5. Passing ‘Selection’: transformation and securing**

Passing the selection process was the first in a series of ‘probationary crucibles’ (Jackall, 1988) and viewed as a rite of passage to commencing the training programme. Whilst it was described as a hugely satisfying and positive event by many of the participants, for others it held considerably more significance, almost a turning point in their daily lives. In the following extract a participant described how successfully completing the selection weekend was a transformational experience:

*‘I was trying to find myself again and it was that weekend that it happened – and it hasn’t stopped happening since....So it almost, it was almost like therapy, it cured, I feel like it was a huge step to getting rid of all my past and demons and stuff really, so that was what did it for me, was that weekend. And I’ve just grown since, massively... I was alive, I was in my element, it was just one of the best things I’ve ever done, yeah I’ve done so many brilliant things in my life... that was the pinnacle for me....I just think of that selection weekend, that weekend, that was it. That’s what I’ve been looking for all my life, that one weekend’ (#16).*

His experience is constructed as cathartic, a purging of his torments, as well as a moment of breakthrough that enabled his transition from a troubled past self to an ‘improved’ identity. Another participant expressed how the selection and subsequent training had been a source of salvation:

*‘I think QuakeRescue has kept me going.... it’s been a bit of a lifeline, really, to be honest with you. It’s one of those things, I was in a very.... I didn’t like me job, I just hated it in fact, but I had something once a month to look forward to and I was described by other people as being this negative cloud during work time but completely different in QuakeRescue time. So... for me, it kept me as a person, alive if you know.... That sounds crap..... But it did... I had something to look forward to. I rediscovered myself every weekend that we did the training, and then I went back to being this person who was just constantly getting pushed down and not allowed to develop or anything like that, so I think QuakeRescue has kept me the same person that I am’ (#25).*

Participant 25 assembled a narrative of being rescued by the organization from an undesired negative identity attached to his experiences at work. Furthermore participation in voluntary work was constructed as enabling the restoration or revival of what he described as his usual or constant self, or what he considers his ‘real’

self. In a similar vein, another participant described how the volunteering had given him a sense of purpose:

*'... I suppose it's given me a direction in life again, so and I think probably most importantly, not just the QuakeRescue stuff but as I've started doing the project stuff, when you, when you're out and about and people are like, you know what it's like, you go to drinks parties and you bump into old mates at parties, 'oh what are you up to now mate? Didn't you leave the army?' 'Yeah, yeah, I left the army' 'so what you up to now?' 'Oh .....well..... You know....., bit of this, bit of that' and you're like, fucking hell here we go, and you're not really holding your head above water at that point (#42).*

Being in the army had been central in this participant's construction of himself and exit from the military had resulted in an uncertainty or 'wandering in the wilderness' (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 143) through not having, what he considered to be, a meaningful purpose or occupation. He continued to explain how volunteering also provided a discursive resource with which to fortify himself in social situations in his self-presentation to others (Goffman, 1959):

*.....and then obviously now I've joined QuakeRescue it's like 'what you doing?' 'Well I'm doing this, that and I'm doing, I'm working for a charity doing search and rescue work' and quite often, that's quite useful because we then don't discuss what the other part of the job is, everybody wants to know more about the search and rescue stuff (laughs)' (#42).*

Volunteering is constructed as a means of resolving the inconsistencies in his narrative by enabling him to author a coherent account of success and meaning, something that he described as having lacked since leaving the army. It also provides a discursive tactic, moving attention from what he perceived to be a less desirable to a preferred version of himself, expressing a shift from the sensation of drowning to becoming more secure in himself. Another participant described the organization itself in terms of providing a lifeline for its members to cling to, as he explained:

*'I almost see this organization as well as someone like a bit of a lost soul organization, someone that really needs just bringing out of their shell, or has gone into their shell because of something else, this can help you get yourself back on track and give you a good priority in life, you know, learning to train to go and do something that is potentially quite heroic really, you know what I mean?' (#25).*

Once again, membership in the organization was portrayed as a chance of self-rescue for those who have become adrift and lost their direction in life. The restoration of self-esteem and a sense of purpose is described as being achieved through the ideas around noble and possibly courageous actions, and therefore identities. This notion of being secured through belonging to this organization was repeated by another participant:

*'I think if I was going to sum up the organization in one word, it would probably be 'hope'. So, hope for the recipients of the work but also I think it's a really good way of building hope amongst the members, isn't it? Because I do genuinely believe it is a therapeutic experience, either at a conscious or an unconscious level for people, just to, just to be together, to have a common purpose, to feel like they can be themselves, and I think, you do derive a lot of hope from that sort of thing' (#3).*

Unlike most examples, this volunteer recognised the value for the beneficiaries rather than just for the individual members. He described belonging to the organization as reparative and a source of optimism for the volunteers, and repeated essentialist notions linked to authenticity in his depiction of QuakeRescue as being a place where people could be their 'true' selves.

In contrast, passing the selection process provoked mixed emotions in me and only served to fuel my anxieties, as described in Vignette 5.2.

### **Vignette 5.2. Passing selection**

**25 March 2014, University of Bath**

*I sit at my desk, hand over my mouth in disbelief, 'oh hell, this is serious'. The reason for my disquiet is the email open on my pc screen...*

Hello,  
Thank you for applying to join QuakeRescue and putting yourself through the selection process.

We have reviewed the scores and each person's application, we have decided to offer you a place on our IRT training programme with a view to completing development programmes for UK and International operations representing QuakeRescue. Not all candidates will receive the same result and we would appreciate keeping results and options to yourself for the time being.

Due to your performance you are eligible for the full set IRT, CRT and support options.

Please confirm your acceptance and any preferences (the assumption will be that you are doing the full course but you can do this training purely to cover CRT only into the future).

Well done and thank you for coming to be part of this.

*I'm stunned. Intense search and rescue training for two years wasn't exactly what I'd had in mind when I'd started the research study. I can't believe I'd been good enough to pass the Selection weekend, I'd barely made it through some of the tasks such as my claustrophobia and fear of heights. I had been totally out of my depth, and having no prior experience of rescue work had relied heavily on the skills, leadership and knowledge of the other members of Blue Team. There's no way I'd ever be able to crawl into a collapsed building or complete a rescue from heights. How could the assessors possibly have seen something in me that they thought I was competent enough to complete the next 2 years training programme? How could they possibly consider me a credible and operationally deployable search and rescuer? It's so ridiculous it's almost laughable. Perhaps they were trying to keep me onside so that I completed the research that they were very keen for me to do?*

*My thoughts lurch violently. How can I possibly back my way out of this and still maintain credibility with QuakeRescue? If I do the operational training programme how would I balance the research study and data collection alongside? What would my academic supervisors, Andrew and Caroline, think? Wouldn't this be 'real' ethnography though? Despite all this I feel an enormous sense of pride – I passed selection - and I'm desperate to share the news with my family and friends!*

Rather than being transformational in the way that might be expected, passing selection evoked considerable apprehension and self-doubts about my capability to be an IRT volunteer in this organization, as well as concerns for the completion of the research. The vignette depicts my sense of being an 'imposter' as a search and rescuer, as well as my comparisons to others who I considered more qualified or experienced than myself. As the training programme progressed these themes were also significant in the participants' accounts, as they endeavoured to transform themselves from being rescued to becoming the rescuer. These identity challenges are the focus of the next data chapter.

#### **5.4 Chapter summary**

The data illustrated that there were many different and complex meanings attached to becoming a SAR volunteer, all of which were intertwined and intrinsically linked to identity. The first theme explored the individual's search for meaning and purpose with individual responses varying around adventure and excitement or the opportunity to learn new skills. However, the majority of volunteers described personal benefits that seemed to outweigh what they gave back to the organization

and its recipients. The second section analysed the volunteers' inspiration for, and experience of, joining the organization. For many of the participants it provides a source of joy as well as a means of attempting to secure themselves. Volunteering offers opportunities to work on the self in a variety of ways, from challenging themselves in physical and personal resilience terms, as well as acquiring new skills. Joining the organization was described by some as transformational with passing the selection process enabling some volunteers to 'save' their selves from their less desirable versions. In almost all of the extracts, the concern of the volunteers centred on themselves rather than the beneficiaries of the charity and appeared to have very little to do with altruism. Volunteer identities, like other identities, can only ever be an ongoing accomplishment, a process of becoming but never arriving, and the next chapter considers how these identities may be sustained and the tensions or challenges in doing so.

## **6. PROPPING AND SHORING, BREAKING AND BREACHING**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this second chapter of data analysis, the specific focus is on how volunteer identities were sustained and what factors presented particular challenges and tensions. This part of analysis contributes to a call to connect theories of masculinity with individual experiences (Mac An Ghaill, 1996) and to explore the discursive practices of men and the ways in which they are masculinised (Hearn, 1996). In the literature, masculinity is often concerned with the political consequences of aligning men against women (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994). However the purpose of this chapter is to highlight how nuanced versions of maleness set men against men (as well as women) in this particular setting, through the enactment of an idealised masculinity based on heroism and strength. My key argument is that the enactment of distinctive masculinised practices were central in the participants' attachment to volunteering, and the constructions of themselves as credible search and rescue team members.

In analysing the data two broad themes emerged. The first theme, '*Propping and Shoring*' focuses on the ways in which the SAR work underpinned and sustained volunteer identities and provided a continued source of interest, benefit or even joy. Subsections in this theme include, heroism and courage, elitism, privilege, camaraderie and the team, and examples are provided that highlight the ways in which the participants described and worked on themselves in an attempt to identify themselves as competent search and rescuers. Theme 2, '*Breaking and Breaching*' centres on the challenges and tensions experienced by the volunteers during the training programme and final assessment process, and there are three subsections that examine their accounts of being the 'other', othering, and comparisons to others.

### **6.2 Propping and Shoring**

In this section, the term 'propping and shoring' is employed as a metaphor for the identity work of the volunteers. In SAR, propping and shoring involves the use of a timber support structure (improvised by search and rescue workers) when tunnelling into a collapsed building, in order to provide support to the walls, and prop the ceiling to prevent further collapse in the event of an aftershock. This section highlights how volunteer identities were supported and propped up by masculine

discourses linked to heroism and courage, elitism, privilege and aspiration, camaraderie and the team.

In a male dominated rescue organization, with a large number of ex-military and emergency services members, it is perhaps not surprising that dominant discourses were associated with stereotypical notions of masculinity. However, there were differences in the use of these discourses and my data analysis shows how the volunteers' accounts were strewn with inconsistencies and contradictions.

### 6.2.1 Heroism and courage

Discourses of heroism appeared in the data when the participants spoke of telling others about their voluntary work, often with references to fictional and famous superhero type characters. In this extract a participant explained that although he felt some concern about being considered a hero of some kind, on occasions he deliberately employed this impression management technique for a particular audience:

*'I think it's, but then it's a weird one as well because you don't want to make it sound like you're sort of a cross between David Hasselhoff and Superman, because I'm clearly not... so, although it all depends who I'm talking to...'* (#14).

The references to superheroes is somewhat contradictory given that in fiction the character's true identities are often unknown and they disappear from the scene before they are revealed. However this was not the case for all the volunteers, as this interviewee described his desperation for an opportunity to be a hero:

*'I like to get in right in the thick of things and be in like, ... what should happen with QuakeRescue once I've done my training and that, and if, yeah if the old 'bat phone' rings and we get deployed somewhere, we're going to be in the thick of it, and that's where I want to be, that's what I want to do..... so whenever it came to it, you can, if someone was flooded and 'damsel in distress' you could get in that water, with the gear on, and go and save that damsel'* (#9).

Not only does this participant deploy a superhero reference of 'the Batphone'<sup>9</sup> but this extract contains masculine and gendered language and notions of a clichéd fairy tale, where the person in need of saving is a maiden who is rescued by the

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<sup>9</sup> The name derives from Commissioner Gordon's secure line to the "Batphone" in the *Batman* television show of 1966–68.

participant. However, ideas of heroism and images of superheroes were not desired by all, for here a participant expressed a sense of disquiet about being considered by others in that manner:

*'But I feel slightly uncomfortable bringing it up as a big subject in a team meeting or to colleagues. I'm okay doing it on a one to one basis. I wouldn't use the word embarrassment but there's something there. I wouldn't want to be perceived as some kind of superman that's going out trying to save people, it's just something I'm interested in' (#31).*

This participant described a wish to downplay his SAR work and dismiss it as a hobby or interest. The wish to remain anonymous and the self-denial of one's exceptional abilities in a 'mortification of the self' (Goffman, 1961) is not untypical in studies of search and rescue teams (see for example Lois, 1999) and was echoed by another participant:

*'... and I'd be quite happy to come out of a hole, and pass that (rescued) person to all of the people outside, and then disappear back into the hole again. I'd be quite happy with that. You know, because... I think everyone's the same, we've had this discussion when we've had a few drinks and we don't do it for the kudos and for the recognition and to be superstars and heroes, I think every one of us would want to back off...' (#5).*

Gendered stereotyped images of superheroes and notions of heroism were considered misleading by a female participant, who felt they provided the 'wrong' impression to members of the public:

*'I think that's something that could be more advertised, it just makes them more sympathetic and not these heroes like 'Top Gun' coming out...cos there was one picture, I remember that, I never forget it, ... there was a line of about four of them and they were walking across the field and it looked like Top Gun and I was thinking they look at least (like) superheroes kind of thing' (#27).*

Discourses of courage were not always centred on the participants themselves but were described as a commendable quality they had observed in other volunteers. In the next extract, an instructor spoke of his admiration for a trainee who completed the swift water training in a violent river having almost drowned as a child and being unable to swim just three months earlier:

*'His courage and his sort of calm response under that much pressure and that afraid ... that's what really stood out to me that, just doing stuff*



*that's dangerous and you're not bothered about it - that's not brave, but to have somebody that's truly terrified overcome their fear and operate effectively, that's awesome' (#11).*

However, the ability to triumph over one's fears was described as a prized quality or worthy of praise, not just for other individuals but for the whole team:

*'...there are these incredible, brave, compassionate people who put themselves at risk for complete strangers because they believe in doing so' (#15).*

In this example, the use of '*incredible*' to describe the team, which includes the participant himself, suggests that these volunteers view themselves as extraordinary in some way. Earlier studies have demonstrated that notions of masculinity and virility are inherently tied up with those engaged in dangerous occupations, e.g. ironworkers (Haas, 1974), paratroopers (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) where working in risk is used to set themselves apart and above others. This sense of elitism is the focus of the next discursive theme that was identified in the analysis.

### **6.2.2 Elitism**

The intensive selection, ongoing training and final assessment eliminated many volunteers along the way, a process that perpetuated a sense of elitism that the participants described in terms of only special or exceptional people being selected for the team, as noted here:

*'I thought we had an amazing bunch of people, and I think everyone always thinks that, but then again you have all been through a selection process together to look for good people, so I think it's probably true' (#15).*

Here an 'idealized' version of team members is constructed, who are better than average and who considered this 'truth' to have been legitimised through the selection process, although this is not uncommon in specialised groups (e.g. Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). The notion of exceptional people was described by many of the participants, for example:

*'I just thought 'cor these people' and that's how I feel about it really – **'these people'**... the people, caliber's not the right word for this, it's the type of people that are doing this are, I just think, wonderful people, they're special' (#16).*

*'It's like, if you have a bunch of human beings, you've got the best pick, haven't you?'*(#25).

Notions of elitism were propagated and reinforced by the management team and external stakeholders, for example, in defence of not always having the most advanced equipment, potential candidates attending an introductory event were told by one of the charity's ambassadors *'The 'Gucci'<sup>10</sup> is within the people rather than the kit. It's all about you. **YOU** are the Gucci'* (Fieldnote: 15 Feb 2014). Comparisons to other elite teams and organizations held significant meaning for some members, as one participant describes here in relation to feedback about the team following a public event:

*'I think it was conveyed to everybody after that, that people were like 'that was really impressive', 'what a team', and even the chap who was the Lieutenant-Colonel said he'd never seen anything like that since he'd worked with the SAS. Now you can't get a better slap on the back than that, from a guy like that, so yeah'* (#5).

This endorsement was particularly important to this ex-military volunteer perhaps because it came from a high-ranking male Army officer, who he held in high esteem. In addition to the sense of 'extraordinary' volunteers, the data highlighted a feeling of exclusivity and a distinctive or special purpose to the volunteering work itself:

*'...I can be here doing something that really matters to me, because, why are we here? What's our job? Our only purpose is to help other people, that nobody else can or will help, anywhere in the world, at any time, and if we don't get them, who's going to?'* (#11).

This participant constructed volunteering in altruistic terms so that the 'only' purpose, as he saw it, was to help others. But this was followed by elitist and self-aggrandizement ideas, suggesting that no-one else had the skills and training, or the desire and selflessness to do this particular kind of voluntary work. The next extracts emphasise the distinctiveness with which the participants considered the voluntary work:

*'it's amazing what the people are doing, you think everyone's doing this in their own free time, and what the guys are doing out in Nepal'<sup>11</sup> now,*

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<sup>10</sup> Gucci is a luxury brand of fashion and leather goods. In the military it is slang for new or replaced kit.

<sup>11</sup> Eight IRT members had deployed in response to the Nepal earthquake at the time of this interview.

*it's just amazing and I think, it makes me feel very privileged to be a part of that and that it's not just, it's not the norm' (#27).*

Once again the notion that the team members are better than average and the voluntary work itself is exceptional is used. For another volunteer, SAR is unlike any other voluntary work he has done in the past:

*'I've raised money, lots of money for (Emergency services and Armed Forces charities) but this is different. You know, to be able to go and actually help people and children that are in total, their lives couldn't get any worse... probably one of the worst situations you could be involved in, like earthquake and things, and then to go out there and save... to be able to save a few people, just to be able to get them out of that hell hole, and give them a few more years really...' (#16).*

Whereas for another it provided something more than average in his daily life:

*'...almost I suppose, a bit of a Walter Mitty life at times as well. And it's not something that's the norm... And if you look at this now, there's only 30 people in the world that do QuakeRescue, or maybe I suppose 60 if you encompass everybody..... Yes, something from the norm, something specialist' (#33).*

His mention of the limited group is a factor of the recruitment process given that entry was deliberately restricted to a select few and the elite status of the team was preserved by keeping many others 'out'. This participant described his volunteering by drawing on the fictional character of Walter Mitty, an ordinary person with heroic and self-aggrandizing daydreams, which seemed to resonate with many of the participant's accounts and perhaps this provides a more holistic view of the volunteers as 'normal' people with grand notions about themselves. Nevertheless, in QuakeRescue there is always the possibility of being deployed and those daydreams becoming reality, but meanwhile notions of elitism also provided a useful resource or support in some volunteer's daily lives, as this participant explained:

*'And I was having a really crappy time at work at the time, I was being really harassed by my manager and it was, and it gave me something else to think about, just actually, 'no, fuck you, because what are you doing with your life?' (laughs) ...And I try not to kind of have that 'I'm doing something really awesome and special and it makes me better than everyone' .I don't think I have that, but there are times when I just think 'yeah, and?....What?... Who are you to....?' It is a nice thing to be able to reflect on' (#29).*

Although he claimed not to, he described how his volunteering efforts enabled him to feel special or superior to others in times of difficulty. However, the need for exclusivity and the recruitment of 'special' people is not shared by all the volunteers, for in the next extract, a female member described how she had challenged a male volunteer who suggested a SAR recruit needed to come from a niche background, or with certain experiences:

*'..and I said to him 'wait a minute, because you don't have to be an ex-policeman or you don't have to be an ex-fireman or even a fireman, or ex-army to be able to do this, I'm a housewife so to speak, I'm a jack-of-all-trades' (#27).*

Several other participants said they did not hold elitist notions about the group members or the SAR work itself:

*'It doesn't need to be an elite group of people, it needs to be as broad and as wide and as many people at the right level of training, the training has to be maintained as standard, but as far as the organization goes, it needs to move forward and do this' (#24).*

This extract suggests that he considered the training programme to be special, potentially capable of taking any individual and making them into a rescuer. There were also others who considered a more open approach to recruitment as being essential for the overall strength and quality of the team:

*'I was always impressed with the recruitment process because I believe, well it's very easy to fill a search and rescue team with a whole bunch of fire-fighters and ex-servicemen and women, really easy, plenty of applications but they didn't, they wouldn't do that because they felt that we need a more rounded team and I felt that's a very, I always felt that was a really brave but sensible decision... I think it really is anybody because you can, if you can pass all the physical tests or whatever in terms of attributes and being a good team member, then it's all the other things that you bring along that really set us apart from other organizations' (#44).*

Paradoxically in this account it was suggested that a broader recruitment policy enabled a more diverse team, with a wider variety of skills and characteristics, which ultimately facilitated a more distinct and elite team than other SAR organizations. Elitist ideals were also linked to discourses of privilege and aspiration in the participants' attempts to construct themselves as search and rescue volunteers.

### 6.2.3 Privilege and aspiration

Discourses of privilege centred on themes similar to elitism, focused on the participant's honour to be volunteering alongside 'amazing people' and the privilege they felt in belonging to the team and organization, as well as towards the SAR work itself:

*'You get to meet a lot of different people and you hear a lot of different stories and they have an impact on you and you feel very privileged to be in their company, and that's everybody that you meet within the organization, from Billy Blazes through to the IRT and the CRT guys, the people cooking the cakes and stuff. It's everybody' (#28).*

In the next extract, a participant described how this sense of privilege drove him to perform to the best of his ability in order to support his teammates:

*'I feel absolutely honoured to be serving alongside these people, and you just try and do your best, sort of not let them down and contribute your little bit and yeah, it's a pretty brilliant place to be' (#11).*

The idea of special people is again mentioned, but alongside the notion of being of assistance or voluntarily subject to others who are more worthy or powerful. For other participants, the honour of working alongside this group of volunteers provided not only a source of admiration but also inspiration:

*'Now, it is a privilege to work with people like that, (who) think that way, and are that way. So personally, I want, I think I have to aspire to be as good as people in this organization....' (#20).*

Several of the participants described Billy Blazes in adulatory terms and described how they would endeavour to become like him:

*'I said about aspiring to be as good as some of the other people that you have the privilege to work with. Very privileged to work with Billy' (#20).*

*'I've never had anyone in my life to look up to or that I found inspirational, and Billy is one of those people, and all of the (International Response Team) guys that go out and do this stuff, they hate it, they hate that attention but where it's deserved, just wow! And I aspire to be a person like that' (#41).*

These examples highlight how the volunteers were 'aspirants' (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009) who attempted to achieve a better or preferred version of their selves in the future predicated on their idealised notion of Billy, whilst simultaneously

aspiring to the heroism, selflessness and comradeship of this international response team.

#### **6.2.4 Camaraderie**

Camaraderie, or the mutual trust and friendship among people who spend a considerable amount of time together, was a prominent and overlapping theme in the analysis. Many of the participants described the team camaraderie not only as a source of joy, but as a reason for their continued involvement in the volunteering. Participants said that consecutive months of training facilitated the building of rapport and strong bonds amongst the team members, *'it's just every time we meet it just gets better and it, I don't know, it just gets, the bond gets tighter and tighter and tighter'* (#16). In addition, they described special or productive time spent together as strengthening their relationships that were underpinned by shared interests and perspectives:

*'...you're all part of a really tight knit team. You have downtime where you chat to each other about everything under the sun. You get closer to each other. You get to know each other more. Just having that kind of quality time with people who you're on the same wavelength with, that's the most enjoyable thing throughout the whole time at QuakeRescue, I think'* (#36).

Furthermore, overt expressions of homosociality and clichéd male bonding practices such as heavy drinking and macho style bar games, were fundamental in the development of camaraderie within the team, as described here:

*'the way we operate really, the work hard play hard, ..... playing drunken games, climbing over a table, but that really bonds you, you can work really hard and then play really hard, when you're tired as well, because normally, you know, normally we're knackered and then we have a couple of drinks, that is real, that really bonds you'* (#5).

Vignette 6.1 illustrates an occasion when I engaged in such masculine behaviours and experienced a feeling of camaraderie with the team.

#### **Vignette 6.1 'One of the boys?'**

##### **December 2014, HQ Gloucester, QuakeRescue Christmas party**

*The QuakeRescue Christmas 'do' was a dinner party in a hotel in Gloucestershire, with every member of the team wearing Christmas 'elf' fancy dress costumes. Over pre-dinner drinks at HQ beforehand, participant 5 regaled the new cohort of trainees with a hilarious story of how the previous year, two IRT members had swapped clothes with some women at the party.*

*In the ensuing conversation it is 'agreed' by team consensus that it would be even funnier this year if participant 5 and I were to swap clothes, given that he's the largest guy and I am the smallest female on the team. At the hotel after dinner, as challenged by the team, participant 5 and I swap clothes in the men's washroom. He's a 'man mountain', approx 6ft 4" tall and 115kgs, and he struggles to squeeze into my size 8 green elf t-shirt, red shorts and green/red stripy tights. His 'Buddy the Elf' costume is so huge on me that I have to hold the trousers up to stop them falling down. We reappear in the hotel bar to rapturous applause and much laughter. After half an hour, participant 5 begs me to swap our costumes back as he can barely breathe in my clothes any more.*

*At the end of the party in the hotel, we return to HQ for more drinking and games in the kitchen. Groups of us sit around chatting and laughing at the antics of some of the others as they challenge each other to drink 'dirty pints'<sup>12</sup> through a fancy dress Santa beard that becomes increasingly wet and pungent as the game continues. On my way upstairs to bed I meet participant 5 who gives me a hug and kiss, and we laugh about our clothes swap earlier and he says that he now sees me in a different light. He also wonders what his ex-wife would think if she heard about it (I had been her work colleague some 20 years earlier and had occasionally socialised with them, although he was not a QuakeRescue member at the time, and I was unaware that he was a volunteer when I began the research). By 4am, most of us are laying in our sleeping bags on mattresses in the training room. It's the first time that the trainees and the IRT team have bunked down together and there's much banter and laughter as the men swap stories of their sexual exploits, until finally everyone drifts off to sleep.*

*Perhaps unsurprisingly the Christmas party was the first time I felt most at ease with the team - when I wasn't struggling with the SAR training and simultaneously trying to juggle my research - and I really sensed the camaraderie and goodwill of the team as we had fun and celebrated the festive season together. This was also the first occasion that there had been no demarcation between the trainees and existing IRT volunteers, or any supervision or surveillance. I wondered why participant 5 had seen me in a 'different light', even though we'd been acquaintances in the past? On reflection I think I'd been quite reserved and so concerned with doing the research and the SAR training that I hadn't relaxed and just been 'myself' - whatever that may be! By unintentionally behaving like 'one of the boys' through drinking and joining in with some of their crazy games, I had experienced the bond and fellowship of the team that I hadn't previously.*

In contrast, another participant spoke of camaraderie not in corporeal, material or symbolic terms (Weedon, 2015) but rather as an intangible bond between team members, which he described as deriving from the organization itself:

*'Maybe not, maybe not so much in (QuakeRescue's) physical ability to do stuff, but just in what it offers people... maybe call it 'spiritually'? In a way to bring people together and having that connection with each other' (#26).*

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<sup>12</sup> A concoction of spirits, mixers and almost any other alcohol that they found in the kitchen.

This bond, many participants said, engendered an esprit de corps and an unconditional sense of goodwill and loyalty towards each other:

*'every time I come down here to do that (training), cos it's 4½ - 5 hours to get down here and it needs that whole comradeship thing where, you know, you do anything for the other people you work with because, just who they are' (#18).*

In addition, camaraderie was credited with supporting team members through challenging times during the training programme or final assessment, *'when you're at your lowest point and you think 'I want to quit this' ... just look around at the people that you're doing it with' (#5)*, as well as enabling them to cope with the reality of deployment to earthquake zones, as explained by a former volunteer as she recounted her first 'real' mission:

*'but I didn't come back traumatised by the experience and I would credit the training with that, and having that real tight-knit team and that camaraderie and looking after one another while you're there' (#28).*

Moreover many participants associated camaraderie with the development of genuine friendships and familial relationships that they described as a source of joy, *'it's the camaraderie, the family and I love seeing my team, I really enjoy seeing them, I miss them when we're not hanging out' (#29)*. The same participant also spoke of a distinctive connection with team members unlike any he had experienced before:

*'there was also really awesome stuff like starting to feel part of something, connected to something, and to a group of people, in a way that I probably haven't really felt before. So that was really nice, being, getting really close to my cohort' (#29).*

Similarly, another volunteer described his pleasure in developing a special friendship during the final training operational assessment:

*'we started the five days together, we stayed together through the entire thing, and we weren't put together, no-one told us, it just happened that we did, ...and just the fact that me and him became such good friends over those five days, it was like finding a long lost friend that you haven't seen in a while, it was just amazing. (Before the assessment) we knew each other, we knew each other really well, but didn't like each other,*



*but then, all of a sudden he was looking out for me and I was looking out for him, the whole time. It was really good' (#47).*

Shared endeavour, with its successes and tribulations is not unusual in accounts of camaraderie (Weedon, 2015). Another volunteer depicted the strong family-like ties as evolving from the character of the search and rescue work, *'...it's that sense of being part of a family really, and it's a really special family because the nature of what we do' (#12)*, reinforcing the extraordinariness of the team relationships. Nevertheless, familial relations were not always harmonious but often more conventional, as this participant explained, *'...and it is a really dysfunctional family, with all those people that you don't get on with all people that you argue with or completely disagree with, but it is still a family' (#29)*. By way of example he told of the development of his relationship with a particular team-mate:

*'we just used to rub each other up the wrong way. He was a bit of a dick, I was a bit too serious, it just didn't really work out, and the process of us two having to, because of the work, find a way of getting on and actually ending up with him, he's probably one of the people I'm closest to now, has been a really interesting experience' (#29).*

Once again it was the completion of the work that was described as facilitating the development of friendship and solidarity. There was also a shared view (or fantasy) that the strong camaraderie bestowed on the team ideas and illusions of 'limitless potential' (Ekman, 2013) as this participant explained:

*'You get a team that trust each other, have bonded with each other and have worked, and I found this on (another rescue team), when you work that closely with each other - ain't nothing you can't do' (#20).*

Furthermore the participants were seduced by a notion of 'the art of the possible' that however challenging a situation or rescue, the team would find a way to be successful:

*'and everyone... just that, that strength as a group, and everyone pulling together and not being fazed, that was the good thing in that is that it doesn't matter what you do to everyone, make us break through ten walls and we're still going to just keep going and encouraging each other' (#26).*

This discourse was promulgated by Billy Blazes in particular, and was observed both within and outside of the organization, during operational training weekends

and at public presentations. It could be argued that the promotion of an idealized image of the team was a form of normative cultural control (Knights & Willmott, 1989), an attempt to regulate the team through self-image, but also perhaps simultaneously driven by the existential voids, concerns and aspirations of the volunteers (Ekman, 2013). The meanings the participants attached to the team are discussed in the next theme of the analysis.

### 6.2.5 The team

Discourses of belonging, commitment and trust were emphasised in the participants' accounts of the team. At the introductory event for potential candidates, a member of the Board compared being part of the team to being a piece in a jigsaw puzzle. He challenged the audience to individually consider *'what's my shape of piece? Who am I?'* and urged them to join the organization *'Give up your piece to something greater than you are'* with the implication that they would be better or improved as a result of doing so (Fieldnote: 15 February 2014). The notion of belonging or devoting themselves to the team was described by some participants as an important factor in their satisfaction, *'being part of a group, being part of something bigger than yourself and coming together and helping people'* (#26) and also a reason for continued volunteering:

*'I think one of the biggest things is the team that you're with, it doesn't matter what we do, so sometimes there's some quite profound events, rescues in remote countries and actually I think it was joining something and deciding that you're going to put the effort into it, and then seeing that grow and becoming stronger and part of it. And seeing that there's something bigger and more important than your own little stuff' (#15).*

The significance of belonging to the team and being a committed member was bound up with a desire to not disappoint the team, a form of concertive control (Barker, 1993), where peer behaviour is regulated by explicit or implicit obligations to the other members, as explained here:

*'...the people, I think it helps you to restore some faith in the world, I think that there are quality people out there and you are privileged to be among them. I'd say that's definitely the main thing, is the people, and that you do what you do to help them as much as anything else, you don't want to let them down' (#28).*

Dedication to the team was portrayed as transformational by one participant, who described himself as no longer failing to achieve commitments:

*'I think, up until a certain point in my life, I had a lot of potential, but lacked a bit of belief and validation, and also just lacked finishing things, you know, so when I told these guys I'd do (a project) I can't let them down. So now I've got to deliver this, and then I've told them I'm going to do this, and I've got to deliver this, and it's cured me, this. Absolutely. I can't fail' (#37).*

His belief that failure is not an option because he did not want to let the team down is self-aggrandising and suggests that there is an assumption that individuals can maintain control and predict outcomes, thus ignoring the contingent nature of the world (Watts, 1951). Another participant also described his commitment to the team as an absolute, and employed an idealised comparison to the military, to explain his attitude to commitment to the group:

*'...but it's because that's the job, it needed doing, there's no-one else to do it, so..... failing is not on the menu today, so that's the thing, in the military you don't fail. Well this is the same. That's where I come from, so QuakeRescue, or my bit of it, is not going to not work' (#20).*

Again a lack of performance, or failure to meet a team responsibility, was constructed as inconceivable. Both of the above examples highlight the individual's desire to prove themselves as putting the interests of the group before their own, perhaps in an attempt to foster confidence from the group, which resonates with previous studies of male workers engaged in risky occupations (e.g. Haas 1974). Trust was a discursive resource in the construction of their aspirational volunteer identities, as participants said that they wished to be trusted as a competent member of the operations team. Intense commitment to the team and its performance, they said, cultivated an extreme level of mutual trust amongst its members, *'it's the sense of being part of a team, being with people who've really got your back and who you know trust you to look after them as well' (#29)* and *'...those guys, I trust them with my life implicitly, there's not many people you can say that with' (#12)*. Trust was a fundamental characteristic of the team and was utilised as a means of coping with the innate risks in search and rescue work, as this participant noted:

*'I know what my skills are, I know how risk adverse I am, and I know the dangers that I'm going to see because I've been through the training. I also have a complete and utter trust in the team that I've gone with and, to use another cliché, you do trust them with your life' (#47).*

Trust was also significant in the way in which the participants' described themselves as volunteers, and what they wanted or aspired to being trusted by the other team members:

*'We trained for the USAR stuff and we trained so closely that I just have so much faith in my team that I don't worry about the rest of the (risky) stuff cos I just absolutely trust them, and I trust that we would work together and that we would do whatever's necessary for each other and they know absolutely that if something happens I will come and get them, without a shadow of a doubt' (#29).*

That said, trust may be an unsettling dynamic and can never be secured in the same way as identity (Driver, 2015) for they are part of the same struggle; fragile, temporary achievements that can only be enacted in practice in that moment, and like identity is dependent on others for its confirmation or violation.

In summary, volunteer identities were propped by discourses of heroism, courage and camaraderie, and shored by notions of privilege and elitism, as individuals endeavoured to secure themselves as rescuers. The next section focuses on some of the identity struggles described by the participants in their accounts of volunteer work.

### **6.3 Breaking and breaching**

The term 'breaking and breaching' is employed as a metaphor for the identity tensions and struggles that were highlighted in the accounts of the participants. During SAR, in order to gain entry to a collapsed building it may be necessary to make a forced entry through a wall, floor or door, to allow access for search, or the creation of a path for casualty extraction. Breaking and breaching involves using hand tools to chip away at obstacles or heavy duty equipment to cut through huge blockages or debris. This second theme demonstrates some of tensions and challenges experienced by the volunteers, mainly in their comparison to others. Most of the extracts were in the accounts of the people who were undergoing the training, with many of these insecurities being less evident in the stories of those who had completed training and passed final assessment, but there were exceptions for these concerns lingered for some volunteers.

#### **6.3.1 Being the 'other'**

The analysis suggested that many of the participants experienced insecurities centred around being the 'other' i.e. not being from an armed forces or emergency services background, about being a different 'type' of person, as well as having

concerns about their physical size and capabilities, *'I was very apprehensive beforehand.....I had it in my head that you had to have been a full time Para or Marine or something, so I was a bit nervous about that'* (#21). His fears about fitting in (Coupland, 2001) or being 'different' were realised during the selection weekend and were something that he described as having had to consciously work to overcome:

*'And at first I thought 'Christ on a bike, this is exactly what I didn't want it to be' but it didn't matter, in a way, cos I sat myself down, I said right well you're obviously from a completely different background from this lot so don't try and, don't try and pretend you are sort of thing...'* (#21).

However, in his first comment *'I had it in my head'* there is a suggestion that this intimidation was something that he later resolved. Another participant said his anxieties were concerned with his physical size and not wanting to look weak in comparison to others:

*'...still at the time I was like 'yeah no chance, I'm never going to get on, I'm 5 foot nothing, and you know, there's all these big scary firefighters and ex-army people' and I wasn't really sure I'd really fit in with it, but I thought I'd give it a go and come along'* (#29).

He revealed a concern about not being 'big' or 'scary' like some of the other participants, suggesting that he had carried a pre-conceived idea of an idealised version of a successful recruit. This impression was echoed by another interviewee, *'And I didn't know if I'd get it, because you know, I'm not like a lot of people here, I'm like creative, and people think I'm a space cadet the way I act, but I'm not, but d'you know what I mean?'*(#37). This interviewee seemed to suggest that there were certain attributes that would not fit or would not be accepted in this environment. Conversely, this anxiety - of not fitting in or not being the 'right' type of candidate - was lacking from the accounts of the ex-military or emergency services participants. This absence reinforces the idea that there was indeed a dominant view of a SAR recruit as coming from an Armed Services or Emergency Services background. However, a long-term IRT member explained how these assumptions were often unfounded:

*'... you want people you can get on with and, you know, you can have 'Mr Rescue Worker' who's like, look at him, he's like a bronzed Adonis, but the bloke's a twat (laughs) and you know, that's no use to man nor beast. So if they don't fit in with the rest of the team then there's no point'* (#18).

Nevertheless, there were suggestions that candidates were subject to 'fitting in', whether they were ex-military, emergency services or from any other background. This reinforces the idea of a closely knit team and a homogenous membership, but is also a form of cultural control and homosociality. Jack Hammer described his benchmark for participants in the selection process, *'I'm not looking for anyone in particular other than I suppose people who with their hearts want to give, and give more than they think they are capable of giving'*, although he qualified this later in the interview when he mentioned that there were similarities in those who were successful in the selection process:

*'If you see people commit to something, and go that extra mile to help other people, that's the reward if you like. We can't test that. We build relationships with people who are very similar to ourselves, that will give that extra mile, and that's the bond, and that's the friendship. So, in terms of looking for it, it's very hard to look at but I think it's organic and it grows, and those people that haven't got, actually don't quite fit in, and maybe leave or do something different' (Jack Hammer).*

Yet again the idea of 'face fitting' is emphasised, as he recounted how participants who were unlike the rest of the team struggled to integrate into the team and ultimately moved away from the group, perhaps to 'avoid being bloodied' (Coupland, 2001, p. 1103). However, the similarity between members is described in relation to their level of commitment and attitudes towards helping others, rather than their previous occupational backgrounds.

With considerable similarity to some the participants' earlier extracts, vignette 6.1 focuses on my own sense of being the 'other' within this group and my insecurities about not fitting in.

### ***Vignette 6.2 The 'imposter'***

#### ***9 May 2014, HQ Gloucester, SAR training weekend***

*As I arrive at the first post-selection training weekend, one (ex-military) trainee directly asks me 'did everyone pass then?' instantly making me doubt my place on the team. Had I deliberately been 'passed' by the assessors out of a sense of obligation because they had got to know me from my observational visits and were keen for me to complete the research? I immediately feel that I shouldn't be there and have made a huge mistake in agreeing to join the training programme. Why didn't I say that I would just continue collecting data? I begin to consider how I can wriggle out of it but don't know how I can reasonably explain to Billy and Jack that I don't want to do the training anymore and I'm worried about jeopardising the research. It's too late to back out now.*

*My feelings of being an imposter don't improve as the weekend goes on and I feel isolated from the rest of the group. During a team debrief of the selection weekend, the ex-military members make several derisory comments at the expense of the civilians, and hoot with laughter as they recall a particular incident where there was some confusion in putting up a bivvy sheet for a temporary shelter, and one of them mockingly shouts, 'let the Chuckle Brothers<sup>13</sup> have a go – to me, to you'. With these comments ringing in my ears, I spend an anxious few hours worrying about how I'm ever going to complete the training when I'm clearly out of place and so out of my depth. With the ex-military group continuing to dominate the training activities, I felt myself withdraw, only participating in the exercises when then there was no alternative but to do so, and increasingly fearful that I was going to show myself to be inadequate and not worthy of my place on the team.*

*The next day I share my concerns with participants 11 and 29 who are categorical in their reassurances 'you earned your place here like everyone else' and how different types of team members are needed, 'we've got enough big blokes who can knock holes in things', and not just those who are physically smaller and able to fit in small spaces to reach casualties quicker, but reflective thinkers who will question, consider, and challenge other members of the team and approach tasks from different perspectives. Despite these reassurances, I have lingering doubts about my abilities and don't feel that I belong in the team.*

*On reflection, the feeling of being an 'imposter' in the IRT team never really left me, even after successfully completing the two year training programme and the five-day final assessment. In spite of claims to the contrary, in QuakeRescue having a military background or emergency services experience is the dominant norm from which everything else falls short. As a student of identity I am only too aware that any attempts to secure myself as a SAR volunteer are tenuous, may unravel at any moment - and in a moment - but this knowledge does not in any way lessen the emotional and identity struggles I experience.*

Even though the existing operational members were quick to reject the idea that there was a 'right' type of recruit and to assure me that the team benefitted from a diverse membership, the vignette provides an example of the tensions and fractures between the military volunteers and the civilian members, and these are considered in detail in the next section.

### **6.3.2 Othering: Ex-military and 'civilians'**

Both ex-military and non-military participants described tensions between the two groups during the selection process. For the majority of participants, the selection weekend was the first experience of working in a combined team and the extracts

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<sup>13</sup> The Chuckle Brothers are children's TV/stage entertainers whose comedy is based on slapstick and visual gags of their hapless antics in exaggerated situations. One of their catchphrases 'to me, to you' is referenced by this participant.

below highlight some of the differences and frictions experienced. A 'civilian' explained some of the conflicts he had felt:

*'There was a few more military people at the initial taster day and there was a couple of guys there I really didn't like. Particularly didn't like, didn't like their attitude, didn't like their demeanour. They were arrogant, very dismissive to us civilians, and I was quite worried about that.... And I really enjoyed selection. There was ups and downs. I got frustrated with some of the army people, because, 'This is how we're doing it' and they dive in and they go into this lingo and they all move around each other. They never compensate for the non-military personnel whereas the non-military personnel are constantly having to adapt to them, which is kind of bullshit, if I'm honest' (#37).*

He expressed being irritated and intimidated by the shared language and practices of the ex-military personnel and described a clear distinction between those with military experience and those without, the 'civilians', as he himself called them. This distinction is also highlighted in the account of an ex-military participant:

*'because as the selection weekend showed me, it doesn't matter about the background, there's nothing stopping people from a non-traditional background, as I would view it, where for this kind of stuff, from having equally or even greater validity in the decisions they make because they bring a different perspective to it' (#13).*

This participant described a military background as the norm and those with non-military training as 'marked' identities (Laclau, 1994) and how the selection weekend had transformed his previous attitude to civilians, suggesting that he had also held a misconception of an ideal or preferred type of candidate. While these examples demonstrated some tensions that continued throughout the training there were also several examples of more positive feelings towards each other. When asked to describe what he enjoyed most about the selection weekend, an ex-military participant described how much he enjoyed being part of a team once again and the opportunity to work with 'others', and in particular females:

*'I think it was the being back as an integral part of a team. I've always been an integral part of a team but this felt different. I've never really worked with ladies before, so to be able to, my whole life has been you know, boarding school, Royal Marines, Fire Service, so I've very rarely worked with the female community and to be able to be in a mixed group was absolutely fantastic and I liked that side of it, instead of all the macho-ism and all that kind of where I've kind of spent my life, it was nice to be, feel more sensitive about and think, and not have to be so 'gruffy' if you like. And also as well just the way that you guys looked at*



*things, differently to us, and I kind of almost embrace that really, and it was, it was just really, a really good feeling' (#16).*

Although the participant reported an appreciation of working in a diverse group and the opportunity to let go of more 'manly' ways of behaving, he also used the masculine expression 'you guys' and the patronising term 'ladies' to describe myself and the other females who took part in the selection, as well as resorting to stereotypical ideas of females 'being sensitive', all of which suggests that he was still very much embedded in masculine norms and discourses.

Another ex-military interviewee was very aware of his vast experience at this type of event in comparison to others, and the advantages that it afforded him:

*'...you know you didn't have to do anything, it was all voluntary, so everything you did you were doing, not because you'd been told to do it but because you knew that there were people there who weren't as fortunate as you in so far as they didn't have any experience of this, this was all brand new to them, so that made you work harder for them....' (#36).*

Rather than being dismissive of those without similar previous experience, this participant described having felt a need to put in more effort in order to support his team-mates through the selection process. Friction between the ex-military and civilians did not escape the notice of Jack Hammer, who observed:

*'....part of the problem with military veterans is they are built in a certain way to do their jobs, and they speak a funny language, they all have the same sort of experiences and backgrounds and talk in jargon that nobody understands. And they can't get rid of that and move in to civilian lives, because they tend to behave the same in civilian life. And you will have observed some behaviours that if you demonstrated in civilian life, you'd probably get the sack' (Jack Hammer).*

The identities and behaviours rooted in military life are described as problematic and in extreme terms, as being unacceptable outside of the Armed Forces, as well as challenging to manage:

*'...and I think the difficulty we have had as people coordinating our organization is to bring the team along with us to see that you're going to get angry with certain individuals, you're going to think that some of their behaviours are strange or they're forming a military wing; it's not, it's part of this rehabilitation process, that by working with you as a civilian, who never had a military background, they will de-militarise through that contact' (Jack Hammer).*

In a reversal from the earlier examples, here it is the military identities that are 'marked' and are described as needing to be repaired or changed, and the notion of participating in this organization is again portrayed as having therapeutic benefits for its members. However, civilian and military differences were not the only way in which participants measured themselves against others.

### **6.3.3. Comparison to others**

The analysis of the data highlighted a perspective that might be expected in this organization, particularly given that, *'this type of work attracts in lots of areas, more of an alpha-male, often people who want to be at the centre of, well not want to be at the centre, they want to be a hero in their own lifetime' (Billy Blazes)*. In general terms, alpha-males are deemed to be the most powerful, dominant and assertive man within a particular group. One male participant, who was widely regarded by the team as one of the most physically imposing and strongest members, was keen to explain that being a stereotypical alpha-male was not always desirable:

*'Because it's got nothing to do with ability really, it's more about your character, strength of character and having the will to carry on and that's how I've always perceived it. If you've got the right mentality and right character, then you can be trained to do anything, ...for me, it's always been built around that, being able to operate with anybody under stressful conditions, when you're tired ... if you got that basis then ... you can learn how to use a chainsaw or comms equipment' (#26).*

The participant suggested that personal resilience as opposed to physical strength was more important, although this could also be considered a more conventional masculine attribute since it is still about strength. Yet again the elite and specialist training was an important discursive resource in the production of the 'right' type of SAR volunteer, although the diversity of what this meant was explored by this participant:

*'... I often say what people can lack for in practical or skills, if they're keen, you can mould them. If they're keen and fit in and you know their weaknesses you can work round it. And you know, not everybody's brilliant at swinging a 14lb sledge (hammer) or using a chainsaw but they might be fantastic at Tech Search, you know they've got ears better than an owl' (#18).*

Although he suggested that a team consisting of mixed skills and abilities was most desirable, he contradicted this later in the interview when he mentioned that having more alpha-males in the team would be useful:

*'...a lot of this work is just, not mundane work, but a lot of it is hands on, get in there, and get dirty. And I think sometimes we don't, we have too many thinkers and not enough doers. So when I do get involved with selection it's one of the things I try and push through, is that, you know, let's find people that can actually swing a sledgehammer not just think about it' (#18).*

Despite some claims that alpha-males were not central to the composition of the team, masculine identities were reported to be 'problematic' for some of the team members (Ainsworth et al, 2014). The data highlighted how many of the participants' insecurities were concerned with aspects of maleness such as physicality and measuring themselves against others who they considered to be bigger, stronger and more courageous. There were frequent mentions of insecurities about their performance, mainly in relation to bodies, particularly in the accounts of physically smaller males or those from non-military and emergency services backgrounds. Physicality and strength were a key concern for several of the members, and in the next example a participant explained how at selection weekend he had made a conscious effort to 'appear' strong:

*'I kind of thought everyone else would be superhuman...I remember getting out of the minibus and thinking I should pick up the heaviest thing possible so that I could contribute towards the group, so I picked up a sledgehammer, or whatever, I turned round and there was one person carrying like a massive heavy water container and there's someone else holding like a 23kg stretcher, and I realised that actually I wasn't kind of helping as much as I'd hoped' (#6).*

His insecurities were fuelled by a preconceived notion of conventional masculinity and of extraordinary physical strengths in others:

*'I was on a team with (another candidate) who is, kind of gives the impression of being kind of indestructible, so he's like just throwing this tyre up the quarry, he's not showing any exterior signs of tiredness or anything like that, whereas I can barely talk...' (#6).*

In a more extreme example, another participant described how his insecurities and perceived inadequacies had almost caused him to leave the training programme on several occasions, and how he had expected to fail the final assessment because of his lack of physical size in comparison to other team members:

*'I didn't really expect anything of it because coming from an IT background, not a physical background ... there were loads of times when I could have quit and I nearly did. So, really early on it was obvious that I was way outside of my comfort zone, not just because I hadn't done any of this type of stuff before, but you've seen the size of the guys there...'* (#47).

Of course, insecurities about physical performance were not just the province of 'civilians', for they were also shared by the ex-military participants. An underlying fear of failure was a particular cause of concern for those who had been medically discharged from the Armed Forces due to catastrophic injury sustained in active service:

*'...when I initially came in I was slightly concerned about how things were going to run out, more than that how my own disabilities were going to affect my abilities within the organization. But actually throughout my time so far...I've never, there's been a couple of times where I've had to, if you like, step back from something, but it's never been a problem. The guys are aware of it, and I mean, my biggest concern is letting somebody down, at the lowest level, is my body fails on me, or something like that...'* (#42).

Working in teams is 'inescapably embodied' (Metcalf & Linstead, 2003) especially in an environment like this, and the participant describes how his ability to competently perform rescue work remains a fundamental insecurity in enacting as a SAR volunteer. Furthermore the ability to fulfil his role within the team also privileges masculine conceptualisations of teamwork. Conversely, another participant considered his lack of physique to be a benefit for the team, although he did not elaborate as to whether other team members deemed this to be a positive contribution to the group:

*'I don't aspire to be super muscly and one of my strengths in this team is that I'm small and wiry because it means I can get into all the little spaces.... my strength is not being like that, which is really valuable to me'* (#29).

As these extracts demonstrate, insecurities based on a lack of physicality and strength were described by several male participants, but were also present in the accounts of some of the (few) females in the team, as this young female participant explained:

*'I look at people like participant (5) or Billy, or something and they're just like Iron Man, they're just there and they know what to do, but I*

*would like to know what they struggle with, like, there must be something, I think that would make me feel better' (#4).*

She compared herself, not only physically, but also in terms of capabilities to two strong, experienced emergency services male team members and likened them to superhero characters, but seeking to challenge her idealised views, wanted them to have 'flaws' or imperfections as a form of reassurance. Vignette 6.2 illustrates my own struggles with a lack of strength and how I compared myself to others during a training exercise using a particularly powerful piece of equipment.

### **Vignette 6.3 'The weakest link'**

#### **13 September 2015 – HQ Wiltshire Breaking and breaching training exercise**

*This task involves the demolition of an unstable wall using a 12-inch disc cutter, capable of cutting through concrete floors and walls to a depth of 4 inches and weighing approximately 10kg unfuelled.*

*The group splits into pairs, one operator and one 'safety' with rotation every few minutes. The instructor chooses me to go first. The cutter has a pull cord starter (like a petrol mower) that you have to pull up sharp and fast to start the motor. Despite several attempts, try as I might I can't pull the cord upwards hard and fast enough to get it to start. My safety goggles start to steam up because of wearing a dust mask and I begin to get flustered and irritated with myself for not being able to do it. The instructor stops me from further attempts and asks my 'safety' to start it instead because he doesn't want me to 'knacker yourself out before you start'. He starts it almost immediately and once the 'choke' is off and it's running smoothly the cutter is passed back to me to start making an incision at shoulder height in the concrete wall. It's an incredibly heavy and powerful piece of kit and it takes considerable effort to hold it steady at arm's length. The machine frequently kicks back whenever it hits rebar<sup>14</sup> so much so that my safety buddy has to support my back with his weight to stop me falling backwards – such is its ferocity.*

*We take turns cutting and although I make several more attempts I fail to start the machine even now it's warm and running well. None of the others have a problem starting it or need the physical support of their buddies when cutting. I feel useless and downhearted, this is a vital piece of kit but I can't manage it because of my lack of strength and physicality. In previous years failing to start the disc-cutter was an 'instant fail' on the final assessment that takes place at the end of two years training. The instructor reassures me that I won't fail as long as I know how to fuel and service the disc-cutter and can act as 'safety' for others. Nevertheless, I'm totally frustrated and feel like the 'weakest link' on the team.*

Like participant 4 earlier, physicality was not the only cause of my insecurity. As the vignette highlights, my struggles also centred on practical skills and my abilities with

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<sup>14</sup> re-enforced steel bars inside the concrete wall

machines. In general, the male team members had more knowledge or experience with tools, from work or home DIY projects. Another female participant recalled similar experiences:

*'... there's no two ways about it, there are things that you are either just a bit dipsy about because you don't know how these things work, you know, I've not had much contact with two-stroke engines and disc cutters and all the rest of it. And you do or say stupid things and they laugh' (#38).*

She described herself as 'dipsy' because of her lack of experience with technical equipment and in doing so was (like myself) conforming stereotypical masculine norms and practices, rather than challenging them. In addition, the rest of the (male) team had ridiculed her when she demonstrated her limited knowledge so in this extract, and my own vignette, the self is constructed as the marginalised 'other' based on differences in physical size and strength, as well as an inequality founded on a societally gendered script and lived experiences (Fotaki, 2013). Many of the participants said they struggled, as they measured themselves against the skills and experience of the ex-military or emergency services volunteers. In the next extract, a participant described a SWAH exercise and how he had struggled to cope with his fear and lack of comparative experience to others:

*'I was up there and I was like ... I just need to go to somewhere where I'm comfortable and work my way up. I can't just jump off the top here. You know, and I was also with two very competent people, I was with (participant 16) and (participant 42) who are experienced at this climbing malarkey which in one way was great, but in another way it would have been nice if someone else was shitting it' (#37).*

In recollecting this he assumes he was alone in experiencing such anxieties and that no-one else was uncomfortable with starting at the top of the building, as some of more experienced team members had done. This account, like the others, is based on a pathological deviation from a norm based on idealised masculine physicality, where individuals conform to a notion that those engaged in dangerous activities or hazardous work often believe themselves to be 'real' men and 'the epitome of maleness and virility' (Haas, 1974, p. 107). Another participant explained how his lack of armed forces or emergency services experience left him feeling vulnerable and unprepared for some of the more physical or technical tasks:

*'...so I was pretty intimidated by everyone and all I really had to offer was adminny type things so I wasn't too bad at the technical stuff, I wasn't too bad at comms, but breaking walls down... breaking walls and disc cutting and all that type of stuff, was a real shock to me' (#47).*

Similarly a lack of preparedness for other activities, such as military style briefings, was a source of embarrassment for another volunteer:

*'I couldn't find my notepad and pen, and we were being given instructions, being given instructions straight away. Everyone else was writing down and I was there like an idiot, without a pen or paper, I knew I had it, knew I'd packed it, something as small as that was quite conspicuous and I looked like an idiot for not being ready' (#6).*

The participants' accounts suggested that these insecurities were pervasive and on some occasions endured throughout the training programme, as this interviewee reflected, *'...and I kind of just kept going, I guess it was actually quite close to our phase 2 (final assessment), so quite close to two years in until I really felt that I was on par with the others' (#47)*, although for some these negative comparisons lingered on through assessment:

*'I kind of went into phase 2 (final assessment) with a little bit of that worry, a little bit of just not feeling good enough in comparison to the rest of my cohort, partly just because I hadn't had a lot of time because I'm doing so much other work to really put into anything outside of training weekends, but also just because I felt like they had so much more skills...' (#29).*

The participant continued to explain that these insecurities remained difficult to shake-off with his own cohort even post-assessment, although less so with the new cohort of trainees:

*'something I really enjoyed with the Phase 1's (recruitment) is that it's the first time that I'd really had an opportunity to take on any kind of leadership role and that was really nice, ...and I haven't really felt able to in my cohort cos I've always felt, I guess, a bit inferior to a lot of them, so I've never really felt I can step up because I don't think I'd be taken that seriously because they all know, a lot of them have got much more experience than me' (#29).*

He described himself as being implausible and unconvincing in contrast to other team members. These constant comparisons to others are significant as individuals

endeavoured to achieve an 'ideal' identity for volunteering in a SAR environment that was embedded in a hyper-masculinity, of being heroic and strong, and so they were constantly engaged in a struggle for credibility in an elusive attempt to secure themselves within the team.

#### **6.4 Chapter summary**

The data illustrated the nuanced ways in which volunteer identities were underpinned and sustained as well as some of the challenges and tensions experienced by the participants as they attempted to secure themselves as credible search and rescue workers. The first theme focused on the discursive resources that the volunteers employed in their accounts of themselves, which included masculine discourses of heroism, elitism and belonging to the team. Camaraderie was described as a significant source of joy by the participants and perpetuated a sense of indestructibility and the limitless potential of the team. The second section analysed the identity struggles and insecurities experienced by the participants during their training and assessment as search and rescue volunteers. For many of the participants, concerns centred on physical comparisons to others and fitting into a highly masculine team. Masculinity, like identity, is a social process that can never be accomplished, for it is never static and never finished. Although the training programme and final assessment were designed to build the participants identities as search and rescue volunteers, discourses of camaraderie, trust, heroism and elitism may only 'prop and shore' for so long, until the 'breaks and breaches' finally take their toll. The next chapter explores the experiences of one volunteer, and his attempts at securing his identity over 12 years as a SAR volunteer, before the final breach or 'ground truth'.



## 7. GROUND TRUTH

### 7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter of data analysis the specific focus is: at what point does a volunteer identity become no longer desirable or tenable? The term ‘ground truth’ was employed by IRT members who had made rescues in earthquake zones. It was used in a typically military sense, i.e. in relation to the knowledge, information, observations and experience gained from deployment to a real disaster zone as opposed to that acquired from training scenarios. The metaphor ‘ground truth’ is employed in this chapter to describe one participant’s realisation that his endeavours to secure himself through SAR work and belonging to QuakeRescue was a precarious illusion. My key argument is that his volunteer identity was entangled and intricately linked to the recruitment practices, structural operations and change processes in QuakeRescue. My analysis explores how he came to appreciate the ‘ground truth’ of belonging to this organization and how he claimed that the search and rescue work had ‘damaged’ him. This chapter also contributes to calls in the literature for more in-depth empirical analyses of identities (Alvesson et al, 2008) as well as Coupland and Brown’s (2012) appeal for attention to identities ‘in practice’ and the ways that these are linked to organizational processes.

In this chapter I have chosen to focus on the account of a single individual, Sam Sparkes. Data extracts<sup>15</sup> are provided from two separate interviews that were conducted 20 months apart. Sam’s lengthy absence before his resignation from the organization allowed deep personal reflection and our close relationship meant that he (unexpectedly) approached me to present an updated version of his story and himself, from that of his first interview in 2014. My concern is not with empirical generalisations or reaching ‘saturation’ but rather a focus on a singular experience or phenomenon, and an account that provides rich, complex and detailed insights. The fecundity and depth of focus gained by analysing the account of just one individual has been successfully demonstrated by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) and Watson (2009). Rather than capturing just one snapshot in time, the second interview provided a longitudinal insight, which allowed the changes in Sam’s construction of himself to be noted. It also offered vivid details of the fragility of his volunteer identity and his attempts to secure himself in a similar way.

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<sup>15</sup> Extracts from the interviews are distinguished by indicating first or second interview and transcript page no in brackets, e.g. (1, page x) and (2, page x).

Furthermore, Sam was part of an elite group as the dataset comprised those who, by varying degrees of involvement, were existing members of the organization and whilst there were some grievances, none were disillusioned enough to resign. Ex-members were difficult to reach and many had no desire to be in contact with QuakeRescue following the bitter rift and subsequent legal battle with the original founder. In fact, the management team had provided me with a short list of people who had requested they receive no further communication from QuakeRescue. The second interview with Sam provided an opportunity to explore the tensions and conditions under which volunteering became no longer desirable or tenable.

In analysing the two interviews, two broad themes emerged. The first theme, '*A way of life*' focuses on the first interview and is concerned with how SAR and belonging to QuakeRescue were constructed as a fundamental part of Sam's identity to such an extent that leaving the organization was inconceivable to him. The second theme, '*Ground Truth*' centres on the second interview and comprises four subsections that explore the effect of Sam's experiences of disasters on his volunteer identity and how these events resulted in his disillusionment with SAR and subsequent distancing from QuakeRescue. A final section, '*The Aftershock*', explores the tremors and repercussions that were felt in the organization in the aftermath of Sam's departure.

## **7.2 A way of life**

Sam Sparkes, age 36, had been a member of QuakeRescue for 12 years at the time of the first interview. He had deployed to several missions, made numerous live rescues and also co-ordinated the majority of the training for new recruits. His high level of commitment and vast experience was well regarded by other team members. Sam was the first to volunteer to be interviewed for my research study that took place on 21 July 2014 and, as vignette 7.1 demonstrates, I was quite apprehensive about interviewing him.

### **Vignette 7.1 QuakeRescue as a way of life**

#### **Interview notes, 21 July 2014**

*Sam Sparkes is a key figure at QuakeRescue, he's keen, committed and widely regarded as deputy to Billy Blazes, although not formally so. At training weekends he gives the impression of a Drill Sergeant, barking orders,*

*frequently telling the trainees that we are 'shit', (i.e. not performing well enough) and making us repeat tasks again and again, even when we're obviously exhausted and morale is low, although many of us realise he is deliberately testing our level of performance.*

*On numerous occasions I overheard him strongly reprimanding others for not having the right kit, for not looking professional or for letting their team mates down. I am wary around him, and sometimes a little intimidated by his manner, especially as I clearly remember him shouting at another female candidate on the tyre-push exercise at the selection weekend, telling her 'move your arse and do something to help your team'. He's loud and jokey at HQ, the first to tease or make fun of everyone and enjoys, in his own words, trying to 'wind' me up. However there have been many times when one-to-one he has asked for my opinion on the training programme or organizational changes, and when instructing took time to explain things in considerable detail, instinctively understanding that I needed time and space to grasp some of the technical equipment and patiently teaching and helping me practice how to tie rescue knots.*

*Sam was the first QuakeRescue member to volunteer to be interviewed for my research. I was feeling quite apprehensive about interviewing him because I was a little concerned that he may provide answers that are trite and typical organization rhetoric and also that he might report back to Billy about the questions I'm asking, and if so whether there would be consequences for the remaining interviews. Sam invited me to his house, so not only was it my first research interview but also the first time I'd seen him (or any other members) outside of Headquarters or training weekends. My nerves soar as I arrive at Sam's house and bump into Billy coming out of the front door. I wonder if they had discussed the interview and stress even more about how he will respond to my questions.*

*I needn't have worried; Sam was relaxed and easy to talk to. The interview went smoothly and he answered my questions openly, confiding in me about his family, his personal struggles and wild behaviour in his youth. He spoke with feeling about what QuakeRescue meant to him, how he felt it had made him a better person and transformed his life. His commitment to the team and his friendships with several long-standing members was very important to him, not least his bond with Billy whom he spoke of in the highest terms and almost seemed to 'hero' worship. For Sam, search and rescue work and belonging to QuakeRescue is a way of life.*

The analysis of Sam's first interview highlighted similarities and overlapping key themes found in the accounts of the other participants and discussed in the previous two data chapters. In common with other members, he too had been drawn to SAR work in an attempt to repair a failed 'aspirational' military identity (Thornborrow & Brown 2009). He had been medically discharged from initial training with the Parachute Regiment and explained how this had caused him to search for something to redress what he understood as failure, despite in the interim having worked in the Emergency Services:

*' .... I've got to go and do this type of thing because that had a large negative impact, yeah so, I'm sure it's something which (I) will always keep referring back to, because it didn't happen and I still find myself today always, you know, looking, just keeping up-to-date, seeing what's going on with that side of things because I suppose that was really what I'm trying to get from this (SAR), is a bit of that...maybe....yeah' (1, p4).*

Similarly he was drawn to SAR work because of the potential for adventure and risk: *'I was young, I was in my 20's so I definitely thought 'yeah, let's go and have this adventure'... you know, I can get away and do something a bit more... I don't know, scary, dangerous, and a bit more adventurous, I suppose.'* (1, p4) and described the training process and belonging to the team as transformational and enabling a 'preferred' identity, which he constructed as being more honest, self-sacrificing and more willing to take his share of the workload, even if that included doing mundane tasks:

*'I learned a lot from being around those individuals, and just maybe some of the character traits that you should have and maybe what you shouldn't have, I've taken on board which I didn't have back then, ...Yeah, from always lying, because it was seen as like a defence mechanism, I would try and defend myself in some way, or I'm not saying not being reliable, but not being a team player because I would always like to be part of a team and see that as really important, but maybe sometimes being a bit selfish with my own approach and not always lifting your own weight and if it wasn't like the pointy end then I'm not really bothered about the other stuff'(1, p5).*

However he said that he had not considered the reality and consequences of deployments, *'...but obviously people who speak about earthquakes and disasters, well I suppose then you don't picture it, don't really think it's going to happen maybe or... you're not going to go and do it for real.'* (1, p3). This contradicts his comment about adventure and risk, as it casts doubt on the reason for joining the organization, especially if deployment to an earthquake is unlikely. Vignette 7.2 describes an event that triggered my own reflection on the futility of completing the SAR training programme.

## **Vignette 7.2. The gentleman doth protest too much**

### **Diary entry: 9 May 2016**

*I'm unlikely to ever be deployed, despite having successfully completed the two-year training programme alongside the rest of the team. Billy said as much yesterday in my post-assessment feedback interview, repeatedly telling me, 'there is a place for girls on the team'. Silently I seethed, 'the gentleman doth protest too much' and resisted the urge to correct his infantilising of the*

*females on the team by disabusing him of the notion that I'm a 'girl' but rather nearly 10 years his senior and have two adult offspring. In an attempt to convince me further, he told me how one female had gone on a mission and had been 'fantastic' in a co-ordination role, from which I surmise that she was relegated to a behind-the-scenes task rather than having a part within the team making live rescues. That said, I don't feel ready to deploy and am unsure how I'd cope in a real disaster scenario, but maybe that's pragmatic and in contrast to many of the other (male) team members who say they are impatient to deploy.*

*So why do I still carry on? The training is certainly challenging for me, as many of my journal entries have demonstrated, but it does provide an escape from the everyday routine, and I have a great deal of admiration for many of the people in QuakeRescue and what they're trying to achieve - although I'm acutely aware of many organizational issues and conflicts. Like many of the participants, I have developed close friendships with several of the team and enjoy spending time with them, so the camaraderie is important to me too. Whilst I did not consciously think I'm striving towards some kind of aspirational identity, maybe I am out to prove something to myself and others, that I am capable and resilient.*

*On reflection this is perhaps a hangover from childhood, from my father who made his disappointment in not having a son very clear to me from an early age, as well as a lack of confidence in my sporting ability throughout my school years, which also originated from paternal pressure. I'm often underestimated by others who judge me on my physical size, because I'm softly spoken and appear to conform to conventional feminine norms. So to return to the question – why endeavour to be a SAR volunteer? Undoubtedly, I have a quiet determination to see it through and not to give up, not because of the research or the sense of obligation I feel to QuakeRescue for giving me this opportunity, but partly a streak of stubbornness to disprove Billy and partly for a personal (physical? stereotypically masculine?) achievement unlike any other in my life so far.*

Vignette 7.2 highlights how, like Sam, the challenge of training, camaraderie and personal accomplishment was sufficient to prop and shore my volunteer identity at that time. Nevertheless, it also illustrates some of the tensions that may cause breaks and breaches to my continued involvement in SAR, not least the narcissistic patriarchal power in QuakeRescue that even after successful completion of the training, would see me unlikely to be deployed to the front line of a disaster. By contrast, the tensions and challenges reported by the other participants were almost non-existent in Sam's account of his SAR volunteering. There were no anxieties about his competency as a rescuer or his physical abilities, and only one example where he expressed concern about a lack of knowledge and experience in comparison to others:

*'I did find it difficult with some of the older groups, that there was a lot of firefighters so then I'd think, especially whole-time firefighters, then I'd think they may know a lot more about this than me so then as soon as you start going through that training process, it highlights that they know nothing, no disrespect to them, and it's exactly the same as this group now, about leadership and teamwork, and officers that..., initially I was like 'oh my god, bloody hell, they're going to know a lot' and maybe after last weekend it just proves and highlights that actually they don't know about my thing, which is fine, it's not a problem...' (1 p9).*

Given that he had belonged to the team for 12 years, had vast deployment experience, many wider responsibilities and enjoyed a privileged status within the group, it would perhaps not be unexpected that he disclosed fewer insecurities around his volunteer identity in comparison to the other participants.

Significant themes that propped and shored his volunteer identity were, like many of the other accounts, centred on discourses of elitism, trust and camaraderie. He described QuakeRescue as more exclusive than full-time professional emergency services, *'I suppose in a way anyone can join the Fire Service, but not everyone can join or do (this) maybe' (1, p4)* and whilst the strict entry criteria of the Fire Service mean this cannot be the case, it highlights the notions of prestige and uniqueness with which he considered QuakeRescue and SAR volunteering. Complete trust in other members of the team was significant and not to be bandied about lightly, *'knowing that they've got my life, and definitely, I suppose it's so hard to say that 'I trust you with my life', people so easily throw that around maybe and it embarrasses me to say that' (1, p7)*, and likewise being trusted by the other team members because of their strong friendship bonds and camaraderie:

*'...a mate has asked me to do something so that's what I will do, and... if it means waiting somewhere then wait there, or do this before we go to that, and there's a reason for it. And if we can't even do that in the UK, then how am I supposed to trust you that you're going to do that abroad? So I think the biggest thing is the reliability... so yeah, just the reliability and trust ... a team player, be there for your mates and do what you need to do really' (1, p8)*

The fragility of these discursive props in Sam's construction of himself as a SAR volunteer and their connection to organizational processes were emphasised in his second interview, which took place on 10th April 2016 after I unexpectedly received the following message:

**Facebook message from Sam Sparkes  
15 March 2016**

*'Hi Sarah, I've not told anyone but I'm just getting my head around leaving QuakeRescue. Please don't pass this onto anyone, it's still a big thing to accept. The reason why I have text you is because of the (research) work you are doing/ finishing and I feel I have something to share with regards to why people leave and the feelings I have from doing this work for 12 years.*

*If you have all the information with regards to your work, then that's ok.  
If you want to have a chat over the phone that would be OK.'*  
Sam

The extracts in the next section illustrate the contrast between the two interviews, from how Sam considered belonging to the team and SAR work as central to his way of life, to his complete disillusionment with, and exit from, the organization. Analysis of interview two emphasised how he reached his 'ground truth' when the discourses that had previously propped and shored his volunteer identity were broken and breached by changes in QuakeRescue's organizational structure and processes.

### **7.3 Interview two: 'Ground truth'**

The phrase 'ground truth' relates to the fundamental and usually grim realities of a situation as opposed to reconnaissance reports or plans that may have been drawn up in advance. A few minutes into the second interview, Sam told me *'I loved this charity and now I hate it'* (2, p3) and drew attention to how his 'ground truth' about volunteering were bound up with disaster missions, the 'damage' or the weight of those experiences and their toll upon him, as well as his 'disillusionment' or shattered fantasies of QuakeRescue.

#### **7.3.1 Disaster**

A disaster may be described as an event that causes serious loss, destruction, hardship or unhappiness, or alternatively as a person that fails completely, especially in a way that is distressing or tragic. In the first interview Sam described the intensity of SAR work in a collapsed building:

*'...to be under a building and you've been in there for 16 hours or whatever, and there's an aftershock, or dead bodies, ripped in half, ... you're submerged so quickly into it ... to have the devastation and save the lives was just so overwhelming and to come back from that and ...I*

*got drunk straight away, and my brother came down from up North and, I was quite emotional ...' (1, p11).*

His vivid description highlighted his sense of being engulfed and overcome by the rescue situations he had been involved in, which resulted in ambivalence about his experiences, *'you know it's like the best week of my life but the worst week of my life at the same time.'* (1, p11) so that the ideas of danger and adventure that initially attracted him to search and rescue work had now become unattractive. Despite this, he described some experiences more positively, such as his role in saving several lives:

*'... it's only by chance or luck that I've gone to Pakistan and been part of seven rescues, that it's happened, ... and then to go to Haiti and it happens there, so, it's brilliant, it's so good to be able to save somebody's life but also to be able to get real life experience and to tell people, that was fantastic, especially bringing teams through and especially for QuakeRescue to have that skill set, that we've actually done it which is so, so rare...'* (1 p12).

Yet, it was the experience, or gaining 'ground truth' that Sam most valued because it provided some prestige for QuakeRescue and enabled him to share his knowledge with trainee volunteers who might be deployed to future earthquakes. However, his second interview surfaced contradictions about the training, which many of the members rated highly and employed as a key element of their elitist discourse, had not prepared him for the reality of a mission:

*'I went in, did the recce on the site, and somebody grabbed me and went 'Sam, come and help me, Sam'. And they grabbed me, and I went 'how the fuck do they know me? I'm from (town in UK)?' and it's got 'Sam' on my overalls and the back of my helmet. And nobody is going to prepare you for that...But that's going to flip you straight out of your comfort zone'* (2, p18).

In addition he spoke of how he was not prepared for either the traumatic conditions on the ground or the emotional cost:

*'I cried my eyes out multiple times in Pakistan. Didn't in Haiti. Didn't in Indonesia, but yeah, hours and hours under buildings, tunnelling, it's 55°C, the second hottest recorded day in Pakistan history and you're working throughout the day and night, and bodies that smell and making rescues'* (2, p18).

The experience of the missions transformed his ideas around what constituted being a volunteer identity in complex and nuanced ways, for in the past Sam had



been eager to make live rescues, but ground truth had changed him so that he now considered that *'you shouldn't want to go away'* (1, p11) and brought with it a degree of humility. Discourses of heroism and adventure were substituted with narratives of distaste for volunteers who expressed a similar desire:

*'We came back from Indonesia and a chap said to me, 'it wasn't very good because we didn't save anyone', and I was like – 'but you want thousands of people to die, thousands have died anyway, but for you to have an experience of saving somebody's life ...thousands of people have got to die '...and for me, it was just a bit of a closed book then, but then that's not his fault, because I was that person once upon a time' (1, p12).*

Whilst Sam acknowledged he had previously held the same aspiration to deploy to an earthquake, his lack of tolerance was not reserved for those who complained of not making live rescues on missions, but also to those who had never deployed, for both their innocence of the ground truth and the grim reality of the aftermath of an earthquake:

*'I was that person when I joined - oh, I'm going to go and do this, I'm going to go and do that. I'm going to go and say, I don't mind losing my life for another person. And I can't, I literally can't be around those people because I find that's so..... you're talking about something you've never done, and that for me is just unsafe practice. And you're showing yourself in a way that you're not fully ready. But I was that person then... (2, p4).*

The previous 'idealised' version of himself as a volunteer was re-authored to a current 'preferred' identity that included a temporal element, *'I was that person then'*, in order to provide coherence to his current narrative. The naivety Sam disliked in his previous self, he now describes in others through a discourse of loathing. But this creates a potentially challenging 'probationary crucible' (Jackall, 1988) for other volunteers, as Sam suggested that they need to deploy in order to gain 'ground truth', but without doing so are ultimately never ready and therefore unsafe and untrustworthy for a real mission. There were considerably more descriptions of the ground truth of missions in interview two, possibly because Sam's illusion of SAR had been shattered. He constructed his volunteer identity as having transformed from a 'better' version of himself, to a damaged and disillusioned self.

### **7.3.2 Damaged identity**

Sam described his volunteer identity as 'damaged' and having a harmful affect on his emotions, relationships, and himself. In interview one he alluded to this change

when asked if there was anything about the volunteering that he did not enjoy, and surprisingly at the time, he spoke of not wanting to experience another mission: *'...it'd be a lie to say that the missions have not had an impact on me, it has, definitely, psychologically, had a few personal stress incidents after certain missions ... and that comes and goes, you could say I've had a little bit of post traumatic stress from certain aspects, so I don't want that'* (1, p11). By contrast in the second interview Sam was clear: *'my emotions have been damaged'* (2, p8). He expressed a realisation that the SAR work had harmed him: *'Has this work damaged me?' I do think it has. And I never thought that, and that's really tough'* (2, p3). He struggled to reconcile how the work he had once considered courageous and an adventure was not so, with the aftermath being so damaging for himself. Sam described how the extreme, all-consuming nature of the work caused him to be unable to deal with the distressing situation at the time, and resulted in post-traumatic symptoms, including flashbacks of dismembered human body parts:

*'And to only have two and a half hours of sleep a day and to be so into this thing that you take whatever you're seeing on board, but doesn't process, because it's so quick. And then you come back and then it slowly unravels itself, and... I can remember driving to (UK town) and I saw an arm hanging out of a bin and it's like 'what is that?' and it was just a piece of rubbish but it was maybe (the memory of) an arm which I'd saw hanging out of a piece of rubble...' (1 p12).*

Sam's account suggested that his sense of 'normality' was disturbed and perhaps it was himself that slowly unravelled on his return, as memories from the earthquake haunted his daily life, impacted on him in undesirable ways and tainted his desire for SAR work: *'I've thought, it's fucked, I'm seeing things'* (2, p9). Sam's experiences in disasters, he said, produced a false immunity to risk, which was of concern because it made him a potential danger to himself and others in his work with the Fire Service:

*'So then I'd come from one environment of emergency service, dangerous, abroad, and your then perception of risk gets lowered because over in the UK it's a 12-pump house fire, you've got more people, so your actual slice of the pie in the risk area is so limited and it's managed and so it's not so traumatic. But to maybe Everyday Joe, wearing BA<sup>16</sup> in a house fire, in the fumes all that, it is very traumatic, so I expect my risk awareness was pushed, so you're not then aware of that risk, and that's not a good thing.'* (2, p7).

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<sup>16</sup> Breathing apparatus

Nevertheless, those not as experienced or as immune to risk as Sam, were described in derogatory terms as 'Everyday Joe', making this part of his narrative contradictory and antagonistic, as he elevated himself above others whilst simultaneously recognising that this is neither desirable nor a safe or secure way of being. This conflict is highlighted by his description of not getting a bigger 'slice of the pie' or the extremity of a more dangerous situation and smacks of an adrenaline fuelled addiction and a narcissistic need to be in the centre of the action, and be the most important or proficient person in an emergency situation. But this extremity seeking was described as a disturbing aspect of his identity:

*'So my wife's friends, they're all thirty going on about seventy, all went to private school and all sort of drinking tea and cakes and it's all lovely. When my last 14 years have been a very different experience, so my darker side of Sam, of the jokes, how I talk about things, always having to push things to extremes, because of always having to work in extremes.'* (2, p7).

Yet again, with some derision, Sam was critical of others who had not had similar experiences and were undamaged in comparison to himself.

Although Sam blamed the SAR training regime and his experiences at disaster sites for his distorted attitude to risk, it is possible that a proclivity towards such activities was the source of his original attraction to SAR work:

*'we train at weekends so every month, you're training to push your body of sleep and food and working round the clock and so ... maybe I was institutionalised into an approach that we have to do it this way, we have to work hard, or drink (hard)... but it's very rare that I do drink, super rare, but if I do, then it's to extremes. So then you push your drinking till you're not just enjoying ...you know, I can't now just enjoy a drink, you drink to get drunk. And then obviously from that is the whole issue of what comes from maybe traumas which can then come up into your mind'* (2, p7).

In this extract, Sam constructed himself as 'institutionalised', with its associated negative connotations, in an attempt to explain his undesired self. The normalisation of risk and heavy drinking in QuakeRescue were described as accepted customs and linked to macho practices. Sam described a lack of self-control and inability to drink in moderation resulted in occasional alcoholic binges that triggered traumatic memories, in addition to frequent night terrors in which the traumas of deploying to an earthquake more than a decade ago remained a nightmare from which he could not escape: *'But you don't know ...why things ten years on are still like yesterday?*

*So, why only last week I wake up soaked and I haven't wee'd the bed, but I am sweating and the bed's very clammy and is that because I'm hot? Well it doesn't happen every night' (2, p11).* Despite typically masculine attempts to suppress his emotional distress, he spoke of a tsunami of emotions and a struggle to readjust on his return from missions:

*'You've gotta push stuff, maybe push stuff too hard, but I got home and I remember seeing my mum and crying my eyes out. Best week and worst week of my life, got and went ...stupid really, went to the pub and got drunk. But yeah, I think you strive for, grab back a bit reality, and then try and grab a little bit of you know, I want a bit of me back' (2, p18).*

Sam expressed a desire to return to 'normality' but this he said was impossible due to the emotional harm and post-traumatic stress that he experienced as a consequence of missions. In the first interview, Sam also described the repercussions of traumatic deployments on his relationships with loved ones and his wider circle of friends:

*'I got drunk and... we were coming back from a party and we were at a hotel, and I got in the bath with my suit on and was having a go at (his girlfriend) 'you don't really understand...' And that's my fault, that's purely my fault, I've put myself in those situations, ...it's nobody else's fault, it's my fault that I've done this, so ....but it's hard for to me... some people go along their life in a way, so not aware of aspects of what's going on maybe in certain parts (of the world), but then.... I put myself there, not them, so it's fine for them to have their lovely life.' (1, p12).*

Whilst he was disparaging of their 'lovely' and undamaged lives, he acknowledged that SAR work had been his choice and for which he alone was to blame. Volunteering also displaced other relationships due to the intense earthquake experiences that others could not comprehend and left him isolated and only able to relate to those who had deployed to similar situations, or also possessed 'ground truth':

*'I love spending time with (participant #18)...and we can talk rubbish continuously and I'm sure people just think we are kids messing about but until... and maybe, until people have done it, they will never know, and been there, and you know and in fact you know you were there, that type of whole... but if you haven't done it, then you don't know and that's really difficult...' (2, p8).*

Previous attempts to make others understand, he said had been unsuccessful as he struggled to articulate the reality and sensations of his harrowing experiences in ways that would enable others to begin to comprehend the horror of what he had witnessed:

*I've had people walk away from me because they asked a question and sadly it's very hard to explain what the work's like without trying to give somebody an emotional explanation or an emotion of an experience. Well I can never give those words of emotion and they will never get that, so it's pointless. It's come to a point of not even talking about it. Well, it's like anything, you know. Tell me about your car, I can understand what a car is. And you go 'yeah, fine'. Tell me what it's like to see a child cut in half. Well, you haven't got a clue. Or seeing a young boy cut sideways and then hearing about somebody with a child screaming miles away, or you know, deep down into a building, and it takes you two days to find them and you find two (dead) people on the way, and you work for sixteen odd hours and there's aftershocks and you're under sixteen storey block of flats or people shoot (guns) in an area where you're working' (2, p11).*

The intensity of Sam's self narrative, he said, meant that it was judged unintelligible and unacceptable by those outside of SAR, the military or emergency services (Gergen, 1994). Identity is a process of interactive storytelling that is contingent on the views of others (Ibarra, 1999) and the negative reactions of his audience caused an identity 'dilemma' that inhibited him from sustaining a coherent and consistent identity as a SAR volunteer (Collinson, 2003; Giddens, 1991). Nevertheless, Sam could be a comrade in war stories with acquaintances who had similar experiences:

*'...he went to Afghanistan, I went to Pakistan and he found it very hard to transfer back into seeing his friends, so it would be me and him in one corner if we went out for a drink ... and everyone else would be over there...so it would be easier for us to communicate on that side of things, which were very different but maybe the same in a weird way, but then we become a little bit distanced...' (1, p10).*

But this friendship only served to further detach them from others: *'so we would find ourselves away from our group of friends because they don't understand' (2, p11).* Sam's experiences of disasters impacted on his emotions, relationships and well-being, which in turn caused him to become disillusioned with SAR work.

### **7.3.3 Disillusionment**

Sam's disillusionment was not restricted to disenchantment with the search and rescue work because of the ground truth of disasters and the aftershocks of

missions, but also arose from disappointment with QuakeRescue. In the second interview, he repeatedly mentioned his scepticism about the ethos of the organization, faults in the recruitment policy and training programme, as well as changes in QuakeRescue's strategic goals. These organizational processes were linked in complex and nuanced ways to his practice and identity as a volunteer.

Sam expressed how his strong identification with USAR and QuakeRescue was challenged by the organization's diversification into other areas, such as flood response and CRTs, which represented a seismic shift from what he considered to be the core purpose and values of the organization:

*'we've got to change, ... you can never stay concrete, you've got to be fluid, you've got to change but surely ... we must always have our core values, our core approach ... keep your core stuff, earthquake's never going to go away, and then I think we lost a little bit of that' (2, p14).*

Similarly, he felt that QuakeRescue had lost strategic focus: *'I think the organization is just running everywhere' (2, p14)* and were pursuing too many other pathways, *'... organizationally, I felt that we're just, the organization was spinning too many plates' (2, p4)*. The diversification from a specialism in USAR and an elite team of earthquake responders, caused him to resist new organizational discourses that he considered undesirable in his constructions as a SAR volunteer, since they were not *'true to the organization, what your actual purpose and role is...'*(2, p21). Sam expressed concern for the cohort of new volunteers who were undergoing training as he felt that QuakeRescue was distracted by the other strategic aims *'...but if we're going training it's the people who have spent the time to be selected, and those individuals should be the ones who have the tool time, have our attention, and nothing else.'* (2, p5). In addition, he said the organization was failing in their responsibility to properly prepare the trainees for the ground truth of deploying to international disasters *'... because you guys are under training for big things abroad.'* (2, p14). Sam was also concerned about the lack of structure and organization in the training programme, particularly for ex-military recruits who had previously experienced traumatic events:

*'And we know, we know that some of these people have been through maybe some of the experiences that I've been through, or different experiences that have happened to them...but I don't really think we're managing them ... we know that they go off on tangents, or go off and just do things and don't communicate and don't respond then why are*

*we prepared, for their safety why are we prepared to put them in a situation' (2, p12).*

The current unstructured training programme had, he said, caused a breach in his trust, not only in the new cohort of trainees, but also in the organization, as he explained:

*'...the disjointedness... and people just coming in and out of training and then it's like I don't know who you are? I don't know what you've gone through? Have you been through the same selection as I have, or they have? Or what syllabus are you on? How do I trust you when you deploy with me? And are you up to training? Or have you met all your training standards? Are you safe? Can you put a tent up and ...even use a JCB<sup>17</sup>? Or can you use the Vibraphone<sup>18</sup>? Can I trust you? Do I know you know what's in your kit? Are you going to, when I'm in the shit under that building, you're definitely going to try your hardest to get me out? Because I know a certain group of people will' (2, p11).*

Not only was he unable to determine their skills and competency with key pieces of equipment but also their commitment and suitability to SAR work. However, it is questionable that he would have been able to do so with previous cohorts of trainees and this suggests perhaps that his own trauma and possibly paranoia were the source of his anxiety. At the most basic level he was uncertain whether they would be fully committed to saving him should a catastrophic event occur during a rescue. Sam's insecurity was aimed purely at the new cohort of trainees, as he considered earlier intakes to have been thoroughly trained and recruited under the previous selection process, in which he had been a key player and had a degree of control:

*'I have to trust my team. I have to know that everyone is to the same standard as the last intake, and they're not section leaders, not in any management role in any way, shape or form, but just the working ant, on the ground, knowing their job and being safe. As an organization to deploy, to an international disaster, the main goal is to bring each one of those home safely but not been put in a situation of stress' (2, p11).*

His dissatisfaction with the training programme and the newest recruits was linked to structural changes at QuakeRescue that had re-distributed the responsibility for the training programme amongst several team members, and as a result diluted

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<sup>17</sup> An industrial pneumatic drill used for breaking and breaching demolition work.

<sup>18</sup> A listening device which aids detection of trapped casualties under collapsed buildings.

Sam's role and ultimate control in the process. The displacement of his position and power represented a betrayal of his trust by the organization, and a failure to reciprocate his devotion to QuakeRescue. His reduced role and authority created a 'threatened identity' (Breakwell, 1986) and a narcissistic crisis as he was no longer enjoying the prestige and 'star-performer' status that he had previously enjoyed (Pullen & Rhodes 2008), although he denied this:

*'And then somebody could say well, "it's because you're not getting your piece of the pie, is it because you're not being recognised", but then I'd think, well, it can't be that, because we've never had a rank structure. So it's not like I was a whatever rank in Gloucester and then come to Salisbury and it's very different? (2, p4).*

In addition to the current training programme, the revised recruitment policy was also problematic for Sam, who was critical about QuakeRescue enrolling military veterans (who were being re-habilitated) rather than assessing them through the selection process on a like-for-like basis with other candidates. This policy, he explained, jeopardised the exclusivity of the team and therefore by the same token his notion that he was attached to an elitist organization:

*'In one word 'elitism' which sounds so wrong and quite "cover your own backside" but maybe I enjoyed, when, (candidates) like yourself, was selected from a group of people through a hard selection...and you were picked for a reason ... and picked because you have the qualities and attributes to deal with that type of work now' (2, p2).*

The discourses of elitism and trust that had served as 'anchors' (Thomas & Linstead, 2002) in his volunteer identity, were he said, broken and breached by organizational processes and policies. Sam could not accept or reconcile the changes to the recruitment methods and training structure, and was unable to maintain his volunteer self without these significant narrative props. His disappointment with QuakeRescue also included the ruthless pursuit of funding: *'...because actually if you go right back, what are they looking for? Money. And so, you're trying to change the in-thing to just try and get funding'(2, p21).* He felt this was a betrayal of QuakeRescue's core values and beliefs: *'We shouldn't always want to please and help everyone because we think there's a pot of money at the end. But I think that's what it is. 'You need that million pounds'. Fuck the million pounds. If it comes, it comes' (2, p22).* This strategy alongside the changes to recruitment and training was, he said, detrimental to the continued existence of the



organization: *'You know, I've just thought, what will QuakeRescue be in ten years time? If we can put the brakes on now, that I don't think, no disrespect to Billy, but I don't think he can, and say 'Stop'. Sort the team out or you will not have a team in ten years time, I think you'll have certain people still there but not as many (2, p23).* He also suggested a shift in his perception of Billy whom, like many of the participants, he had almost hero-worshipped in the first interview and in whose leadership abilities he now doubted.

But more so, he was disillusioned that the ethos of the organization was not what it claimed or he had thought it to be for the past 14 years: *'I think from the ethos that the organization maybe lived by of...'if you can do it, then do it, if you can't then go away but we're still here'. I don't believe that maybe those foundations are as true as they may sound...there was a lot of pressure on (me), 'right well, go off, get over it, get back' (2, p3).* When Sam had spoken of his concerns with Billy he had been told to take a break in order to reconcile himself and return when he had done so. Even though Billy had given him space or 'wobble room' with which to re-author his volunteer identity, he was unable to reconcile these tensions and as a result his membership in QuakeRescue was no longer tenable (Clarke et al, 2009).

Despite his disillusionment and the 'fact' that he said he was no longer 'duped' by dominant organizational discourses (Collinson, 1992), Sam said he would still recommend this type of work to others:

*Yeah. It's a great ... it's a great thing. If I was under a building in Pakistan would I want someone to come and save me? Yes. So, that can only happen by somebody putting their effort in and doing it. Just I want that person to be right. I want that person to be safe. And I want that person to be, their knowledge and understanding of what they need to do as a working ant, as a rescue worker, taking leadership from somebody with experience ... to be safe and know their job' (2, p18).*

Although Sam considered SAR to be important, he reiterated the need for the right type of volunteer, effective training and leadership, which epitomised the tensions and ambivalence he experienced that ultimately led him to distance himself from QuakeRescue. Although he had little room to manoeuvre, he was able to 'act otherwise' and so resigned from the organization (Giddens, 1979).

#### 7.3.4 Distancing

Sam's endeavours to distance himself from the organization were described in terms of a personal transformation as well as an epiphany about his commitment to QuakeRescue and the team. He reflected that perhaps he had evolved from QuakeRescue, *'do you grow out of an organization? ... maybe I have'* (2, p5). In 'traversing the fantasy' (Lacan 1988) Sam provided a narrative of justification that his volunteer identity could not be sustained, although he suggested that perhaps this was an inevitable consequence of SAR, *'but I do think, with this type of work, if your time is up, then your time's up'* (2, p2). Arguably, by distancing himself, Sam was attempting to protect and repair his damaged identity. His dissatisfaction with volunteering centred on internal issues within QuakeRescue rather than on the SAR work itself, *'...organizationally I felt there were barriers, which I felt were difficult to get over and I also felt that...I was pigeon holed'* (2, p5). His concern for himself, rather than the SAR work possibly highlighted a destructive and masculine form of narcissism. In interview one he had constructed himself as a 'star performer' and 'loyal servant' of the organization, but he now recast himself as the 'victim' (Pullen & Rhodes 2008). He also attempted to maintain himself as a 'moral' person, concerned with the protection of others (Hart et al, 1998), i.e. the trainee volunteers, by condemning the training programme and QuakeRescue's shortcomings in preparing them for the ground truth:

*'I don't think the question should be: Should people do this work? No, the question should be: Is the organization taking responsibility correctly for people willing to be put in this situation? And that would be my question mark. So we must train and prepare the volunteers who want to do this ....You must prepare them and open their eyes fully to all areas'* (2, p18).

Although he shifted from conforming to macro discursive regimes, to resisting and taking control back for himself (Gabriel, 1999) the use of the term 'we' rather than 'them' suggests that he had not fully redefined himself or relinquished his attachment to QuakeRescue, despite his claims to the contrary.

A discursive tactic employed in his disidentification from the work and the organization was observed in the inconsistency with which Sam described the selfishness of charity work. In interview one, his commitment to the work and QuakeRescue was of fundamental importance and took priority over his relationship: *'When I met my fiancée, or girlfriend back then, it was 'this is what I do'* (1, p9) and *'...I suppose, I've forced her to be an independent individual in a couple*

*and there's friends of hers that I've never met in 7 years (laughs) ....but that's life...it's one of those things I suppose' (laughs) (1, p11).* In an endeavour to justify this comment, Sam had explained this as necessary for the benefit and success of the team: *'I give them more time than I give my fiancée, I give them more, the training, pass over experiences, and to be there, and to want them to do well and maybe push them or ...' (1 p12)* possibly in an attempt to rationalise and make acceptable his extreme commitment to QuakeRescue. However, in contrast in the second interview, Sam described his dedication to volunteering as taking an unacceptable toll on his relationship with his wife<sup>19</sup> :

*'I was working maybe as well two weekends, with my other work, and then training one, so my home life, myself and (wife) have been together eight/nine years, and the first eight years, I'd see her once a month, so I would see my wife twelve times a year on a weekend which.... we were living completely separate lives' (2, p6).*

That said, Sam engaged in careful impression management tactics as he described the work itself, rather than his relationship with it as selfish, and over-involvement as almost inevitable due to the adventurous and exhilarating nature of SAR, *'So charity work is so selfish. ...especially in that environment, because urban search and rescue which sounds very sexy and you know you go and do these amazing things, and ... people maybe get a little bit ...over-enthusiastic and maybe jump a little bit too much' (2, p7).* Furthermore Sam did not take personal responsibility and generalised his warning that 'people' should not privilege SAR work. He recollected occasions that, upon reflection, he considered were warning signs that he had become too involved and over committed:

*'But I'm sure people have left the charity because...me having a go at them...If you speak to (participant #47), I said to him, once upon a time, 'if you don't want to be here, then 'F off' home'. Now on reflection ...was that an early sign of... why I just took it as he'd messed up and I'd get - it would just annoy me - so it's that passion. Is that passion or is it that I'm not controlling myself, and who learns from that? Well everyone learns that if you do something wrong Sam shouts at you' (2, p 9).*

With the benefit of hindsight, Sam concluded that his lack of tolerance for others with limited training or lack of mission experience was a signal that he had lost perspective, his ability for self-surveillance and discipline, and had resorted to behaviour which would have been deemed unacceptable in any other workplace.

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<sup>19</sup> Sam and his fiancée married in the interim between the two interviews.

The analysis of interview one indicated that he had perhaps over-subscribed to the idealised or 'fantasy' SAR volunteer identity to such an extent that a narcissistic and almost invincible sense of self was created, which was highly dependent on his membership at QuakeRescue (Dutton et al, 1994, Gabriel, 1999). The extent of his over-involvement was such that leaving the organization had been considered unimaginable and something he would be unable to articulate when presenting himself to others, highlighting the centrality of SAR volunteering in his identity:

*'No, no... I'd stay with Billy, (#18) and (#34) and Jack... I come close to it last year...but then I thought well what would I do? ...So no, I don't think I would (leave) I've done, learnt too much to then just go 'I'm leaving' or been part of the team too long really I think. Yeah, cos people would ask me 'what do you do, are you still..?' and I'd be like, 'No I don't', right 'why is that?' so it's easier just to stay in it (laughs)' (1, p14).*

By contrast, interview two highlighted a total reversal where Sam described leaving QuakeRescue as being easier than sustaining his membership: *'it's easier to undo those (packed deployment) bags and go, 'yeah, I'm not part of that anymore'...and that's not a problem' (2, p10)*. He also explained that this was less problematic when presenting himself to others, *'I'm happy just to walk away, maybe that's really selfish of me....it's easier for me to just to go 'that's done' and just walk away, because I've still got to deal with everyone in my normal life going, 'Oh there's an earthquake, are you going to it? ...it's more of a relief to say 'No, I don't do that anymore' (2, p9)*. The tension Sam had previously reported in explaining his volunteer identity to others receded with his exit from the organization. Although he spoke with less concern about his commitment to his team mates, he expressed a desire not to allow his own shattered illusions to affect those friendships:

*'I do miss people. I do miss it, but I know it's not right for me to be there because I don't want to be negative. And I don't want to be negative towards people because then maybe... we'd fall out with people, and that's what I don't want. It's easier just to slide away' (2, p19).*

Although the dominant themes in interview two centred on the cost of the volunteer work to Sam's identity and wellbeing, as well as his disappointment with QuakeRescue, he manoeuvred between antagonistic discourses: *'And I'm happy with what I've achieved and been very lucky and successful with that type of work but I don't want to look back and go for that charity work, I have damaged my life or I've damaged my marriage' (2, p7)* in contrast to his repeated assertions that he had

been damaged. Alternate positions included being grateful for not losing his relationship or harming himself further: *'I'd rather now look back at it, oh that was lucky, didn't lose the missus, get so pissed I drove the car into something, in prison and that would have been silly.'* (2, p15). Sam also said that he was satisfied with his decision to leave QuakeRescue, *'But now I feel happy, I think that's the main thing. That's not a false feeling. I've got to listen to it, I'm actually quite happy with what I've done, the decision that I've made.'* (2, p23). Yet leaving QuakeRescue created a new identity 'dilemma' that was concerned with what does he now become and what fantasy does he take up? (Lacan, 1988). This was highlighted when he explained how he had already considered joining another humanitarian organization to do SAR work:

*'it's "what am I going to do now?" And stupidly I thought am I going to go and join this organization? I don't really understand why I thought that. I think that's maybe just trying to fill the void...' (2, p15).*

This was, perhaps, an indication that he had not fully distanced himself from SAR work and was still engaged in a narcissistic struggle to secure himself in this particular way.

From outside the organization and with the benefit of reflection, *'... until I suppose you pass through, you remove yourself from the environment'* (2, p8), Sam said he was now able to see the SAR work and QuakeRescue for the illusion that it was. Although he said he did not entirely blame QuakeRescue and acknowledged some of the responsibility: *'... this isn't all QuakeRescue's fault, this is my taking on too much and stretching myself'* (2, p8). His departure from the organization was an attempt to reconcile some identity tensions however his volunteer self does not constitute the 'whole person' and his identity and cannot be 'separated out' (Watson, 2009) because subject positions cannot be determined by any single discourse (Kuhn, 2009).

#### **7.4 The aftershock**

At the end of the second interview, Sam and I shared our concerns for each other. I told Sam that he would be missed by many of the team, and urged him to seek professional support. Sam's concern for myself centred on how I could best endure the forthcoming final assessment and he also expressed some anxiety for me should I deploy in the future, *'I hope you don't have any shit, and you can always*

*phone me if you are anywhere trapped and go 'Sam, you come back and rescue me', although in typical Sam style he added jokingly, 'And I'll see if I'm free...'. Despite distancing himself from QuakeRescue, it seemed that his friendships and bonds with his team mates remained important as his closing words to me were 'If there's anything you need, just call'.*

### **Vignette 7.3 My own 'ground truth'**

**April 2016**

*I'm shocked when I receive Sam's message and saddened that he has left QuakeRescue; I'll miss his larger-than-life presence and antics. He and I chat for nearly an hour and a half on the phone and I'm close to tears when the call ends. Although he'd previously mentioned some of the post-traumatic episodes he'd experienced, I had no idea how much he had suffered and how badly these events had affected him. I'm also concerned that he has so drastically cut off what was previously an important, if all-consuming, part of his life; his sense of loss, particularly about his close friendship with Billy, was palpable over the line.*

*Later, I realise that Sam's phone call raises a series of new, uncomfortable, questions for me. Previously questions attached to my SAR volunteering centred on my technical skills and capability to deploy, but now I am very aware of my naivety and the realisation of my involvement in SAR work hits me. Sam's graphic description of the trauma and damage that missions had caused, has made me realise that perhaps naively, but possibly like many others, I had presumed that his training with the Parachute Regiment and the Emergency Services would have accustomed him to some degree to such traumatic events. I've always considered myself lucky and been thankful that I've never seen a dead body or witnessed any serious accidents or casualties, and whilst I might be gaining technical SAR skills I have absolutely no preparation for the horrors and destruction I might face on a deployment - and this realisation shakes me. Of course, as Sam's experiences demonstrate, could you ever be prepared for such events?*

*If I'm honest, I have had a lingering concern that my maternal instinct might make it very difficult for me to let go of any casualties that I might deal with and especially so if they were children. Like Sam when he first joined QuakeRescue, I guess I've never thought that I might really deploy and as a result I've not thought in great depth about the realities of working under a building for an extended period of time, or of the sights and smells of decomposing bodies, as well as the squalid living conditions. Certainly I've trained in cold, challenging conditions and eaten ration packs for five days but there's always the reassurance of knowing that there's not going to be an aftershock that brings down the building on top of you. But what's it really like for 14 continuous days, in hostile, chaotic, insanitary conditions? On the last mission to Nepal, Billy had been infected with campylobacter caused by having to camp near a stream that was an open sewer and had suffered dysentery-like symptoms for several weeks on his return, losing nearly a third of his bodyweight as a result. That said I'm certain that if I did deploy I would work immensely hard to help survivors locate their loved ones - and hopefully to rescue them.*

*Have I been really selfish? Have I truly considered the impact on my family if I were to deploy to an earthquake? Have I carefully enough asked my husband, daughter and son how they would feel about it? Previously they've said they would support me and trust in QuakeRescue to take care of me - and whilst QuakeRescue may indeed do all that they can to protect me from physical harm - they can do little to protect me from emotional harm and trauma of a disaster zone. Have my family fully considered how emotionally difficult it might be for them left at home, waiting for the phone to ring with updates on my situation? Perhaps like me, they have also thought my deployment unlikely to ever really happen. It's time for some deep conversations at home.*

*However, there's one question that I am unable to resolve - if I were to deploy, how (like Sam) would my relatively sheltered and privileged life be skewed on my return? Ultimately that's a risk I need to weigh up carefully, as I'll never know the answer until I return from a mission, in which case it could be too late and the damage might already be done.*

There was no official announcement of Sam's resignation and I did not mention it as he had contacted me in confidence. So I waited for the news to break at QuakeRescue. However, it just trickled through gradually as other team members found out through personal contact with him. A participant later told me that historically management did not cascade news of resignations to the wider team and that there had been several others '*who have just drifted away, and without anything being said or made known why they have*' (#48) although he attributed this to a typical lack of communication at QuakeRescue, rather than a deliberate strategy. Arguably, it could be considered a deliberate attempt by management to contain the disillusionment and damage experienced by Sam.

During the many months before his official resignation, Sam's absence had been explained by the management team as due to family commitments that included his recent marriage and house move, as well as problems with his self-employed business. Throughout that time, I observed a lack of organization in Headquarters, general untidiness and the store not being properly closed down at the end of training weekends. One trainee commented that this had only become the case since Sam's absence, as he had a checklist of closedown tasks for the end of training weekends to which everyone was expected to contribute before they departed for home. On numerous occasions I noted the complaints of others concerning the lack of structure of the training itself. Sam had often arrived on Friday lunchtimes to construct training scenarios and prepare tasks for the trainees. Under Sam's supervision training had started promptly with a briefing at 2200 hours on Friday and we often worked overnight and throughout the next day before the

scenario was completed. Without Sam, there was little forward planning of the training and much time was spent hanging around whilst existing IRT members devised a rescue scenario. Whilst these were not significant issues they highlighted the extent of Sam's organization skills and dedication to the team and how, without him, normal practices and processes appeared to begin to unravel.

Like myself, many of the volunteers said they were shocked and saddened by Sam's departure from QuakeRescue. Sam resigned after the research interviews had been completed, so the following extracts are drawn from notes of ongoing conversations with team members. In general, it was agreed that Sam was *'such a good bloke.....absolutely top bloke'* who was *'...just morale, he was a funny bloke, you could have a good crack with him'* (#9), as well as an *'invaluable member of the team'* (#16). His departure, they said, represented a significant *'knowledge loss for the team'* (#6) because of his *'shitload of experience'* gained from deployments to various disasters from which they had *'always learnt something that was really valuable.....based on (Sam's) firsthand lived experience'* (#29).

On an individual level, responses were more mixed. One participant described himself as *'absolutely devastated'* by Sam's resignation and felt that many team members had been *'upset that they never got to say "thanks a lot" and "hope to see you around" and to shake his hand'* (#9). One IRT member said Sam was *'one of the absolute stalwarts'* who had personally supported him and *'got me through my training'* (#49). By contrast, another participant told how he and Sam had not always seen *'eye to eye'* and that he had struggled with Sam's *'sense of entitlement and privilege and bolshieness and non 'pc'-ness and all that kind of blokey culture he was part of'* as well as his jokiness, which *'sometimes it was funny, and sometimes it was offensive or really inappropriate'* (#29). Similarly an IRT trainee said he had often been unsure when Sam was being serious or messing around at training, and that he would often *'get it wrong as to when it was playtime...and when we were supposed to be on exercise'* and whilst he was *'not glad to see Sam go at all...it focused training a little bit'* and how for him *'having that little bit of space actually helped'* (#6). Another participant also considered that Sam's departure *'creates space for other people to step up'* (#29) and allowed other team members to take on new roles and responsibilities. However, it also created some insecurities, *'when someone who seemed so certain about what we're all doing stops being certain about that...I think it makes people question themselves and what's going on'* (#29), as my own experience in Vignette 7.3 also highlights.



Analysis of the participants conversations highlighted that they had, to varying degrees, accepted that Sam's personal and family pressures were the major reason for his resignation. Nevertheless, some described other, partially overlapping, factors that they said were significant in Sam's departure. One participant described how he *'... got the impression (Sam) didn't like the way it was heading...the direction we were going in as QuakeRescue...he wanted us to be concentrating on USAR more, a lot more than we were...'* (#16). Another participant also mentioned Sam's dissatisfaction with QuakeRescue's strategy but felt that this had caused another major issue, *'I think because Sam wasn't happy with the way things were going it put a strain on his and Billy's relationship'...* and added *'I think one of the main reasons that Sam left was because their relationship completely broke down'* (#49). In his second interview, Sam had hinted that his friendship with Billy had become strained and this was also noticed by another participant who commented, *'very very long time, the pair of them have (been friends), thick as thieves those two, so I'm not sure what's happened'* (#16). He said that he had also noticed the impact on Billy, *'Billy was really gutted. Sam didn't come to Billy's leaving do (from day job). Billy was absolutely gutted'* (#16). This may explain why no announcement of Sam's resignation was made, as possibly Billy was struggling to deal with the loss of what others described as his *'right hand man'* (#9) and long term friend.

An additional factor that some team members said contributed to Sam's resignation was his *'damage'*, as one participant explained, *'he had a few demons to fight through... from Pakistan'* and that Sam had told him that he had *'burnt-out'* (#16). Another participant said that Sam *'...had long term effects of the missions that he'd done. Nightmares and flashbacks and stuff like that'* and that although *'this isn't a secret'* it was not discussed in QuakeRescue and *'there wasn't any way he could actually address it'* (#29). Furthermore, he said, the typically masculine *'stiff upper lip'* practices and invisibility surrounding the traumatic experiences of missions was symptomatic of *'a culture of not talking about it, that was a culture perpetuated by the whole organization'* that he linked to *'toxic masculinity'* where traumatic events were expected and required *'manning up and doing this job....but you can't talk about it afterwards'* (#29).

Sam was not alone in saying that missions had affected him but there was only one other participant who hinted at *'damage'* and mentioned traumatic recollections of harrowing rescues: *'I don't really want to be reminded about that, I've enough*

*memories of that I don't particularly want to keep reliving'* (#18). By contrast, another participant, who like Sam had deployed to several earthquakes, claimed that missions had no impact on himself, *'Nothing...yeah obviously you're happy to find someone alive and to save them but I don't get hung up on stuff like that'* (#34). Another participant said that deploying to his first disaster had been less traumatic than he had expected, *'I think if anything it has made me want to go more. I just feel that I've got more experience now to give them... I'm not scared...I'm less scared now having been through it'* (#47). Others described a renewed appreciation for their daily lives on return from a mission, *'you do look on a different side of life, you really do, and you cherish every minute...and it was from that day on that I started thinking... "live every day as your last"'* (#17), or a lack of tolerance for those who complained about their privileged lives:

*'I came away from Haiti...with a lower tolerance to people back here...you come home and you're faced with people whinging about what we call nowadays 'first world problems' and it makes me rather annoyed...you just think 'you don't know how lucky you are' (#44).*

However, one volunteer told how being involved in the rescue of a young boy held significant meaning for him and had been an enduring positive experience:

*'...I've been out to see him...he's taller than me now, got a Masters degree....he's just like a good old friend...it's nice to see him growing up and being successful in life, actually shows you that even though, out of all the many people who died, you save one life and actually what a difference it can make and how important it is' (#46).*

These examples highlight the precarious nature of identity, and how experiencing the 'ground truth' of a disaster may transform an individual's life perspective and views of others, and for some cause irreparable damage to their volunteer identities.

## 7.5 Chapter summary

The data illustrated the arguably self-defeating nature of identity work and the ways in which identities 'in practice' are linked to organizational processes. The first theme explored how being a SAR volunteer and belonging to QuakeRescue was a 'way of life' for Sam that was linked to a narcissistic preoccupation with the self. The second section analysed how discourses of elitism and trust that had propped and shored Sam's volunteer identity were broken and breached. Complex and overlapping tensions caused by organizational changes and multiple deployments to earthquakes led Sam to a 'ground truth' or realisation that he could not secure himself in this way and his volunteer identity and membership of QuakeRescue became untenable. His belief in the discourses, promulgated by the organization

and its members, were seen for the fantasies that they were, but the illusion had been shattered and could not be recaptured (Ekman, 2013).

## **7.6 Summary of data chapters**

The three data chapters have considered how individuals' discursively constructed their volunteer identities, how these identities were sustained and the ways in which volunteer identities became untenable and undesirable. Chapter five, '*Searching and Rescuing Selves*' explored the significance participants attached to volunteering and how they attempted to secure themselves through SAR work and membership of QuakeRescue. Chapter six, '*Propping and Shoring, Breaking and Breaching*' focused on the nuanced ways in which volunteer identities were underpinned and sustained by discourses of heroism, elitism, trust and camaraderie. It also considered the identity struggles and tensions they experienced during the selection and training process. Finally chapter seven explored how one participant's volunteer's identity transformed as he realised the 'ground truth' or futility of endeavouring to secure himself through SAR and QuakeRescue membership, and how this shattered illusion rendered his volunteer identity untenable.

In the following chapter, the themes of searching and rescuing selves, propping and shoring identities, the futility of identity work and how identities in practice are linked to organizational processes are developed further and discussed in light of extant scholarship regarding identities and discourse.

## 8. DISCUSSION

### 8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present three different readings of the data: an examination of the volunteering literature with regards to this extreme form of volunteerism; a synthesis of the masculinities literature in relation to the construction and maintenance of SAR identities in QuakeRescue; and finally an ethnographer's interpretation that highlights the conflictual nature of fieldwork as well as offering a reflective account of my own story in this research.

The first reading, '*Volunteer identities: Altruism, atonement and extreme volunteering*' examines the findings from the case study in relation to the volunteering literature, and whilst the dominant paradigm of volunteering views the motivations of individuals as altruistic, some authors have considered the essence of volunteerism to be a complex range of interrelated factors (Smith, 1981). This reading considers the possibility of altruism but also narcissistic and existential self-concerns such as the need to find meaning, or atonement, as significant factors in volunteering. The benefits of volunteering for an individual may include satisfaction, the gaining of new skills and experiences (Kearney, 2007), as well as improved physical and mental health (House, Landis & Umberson, 1988; Musick, Herzog & House, 1999), but this study also illuminates how this extreme form of volunteering resulted in emotional distress and psychological trauma for some participants. In addition, there is a dearth of empirical studies that have linked risk or danger with volunteering (with exception Lois, 1999 and O'Toole & Grey, 2016) and few that have conceptualised volunteering in relation to the identities and identity work of individuals. My primary contribution in this reading is in developing the thesis that in joining this organization to save others, the volunteers were engaged in a search for meaning and attempting to rescue themselves.

The second reading, '*Masculine identities: Volunteering to be a hero*' examines tensions raised in the literature on masculinity. The accounts of the volunteers illuminate the enactment of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities in QuakeRescue. Since what it means to be a man is 'an umbrella term encompassing a variety of overlapping perspectives' (Watson, 2000, p. 35), the plurality and hierarchy of masculinities is also considered, as well as the ways in which some males felt the gaze of others whilst aspiring to idealised identities in this male-

dominated setting (Coupland, 2015). My main contribution in this reading is that individuals, mostly men but also some women, volunteered in a rescue organization to 'search' for and perhaps 'rescue' a version of themselves as masculine.

The final reading, *'Too close for comfort?'* examines the vignettes contained within this thesis as the ethnographer asserts their 'authorial personality' (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 484) by revealing 'their personal investments in the research, various biases they bring to their work, their surprises and undoing's in the process of the research endeavour...' (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027). It is the 'surprises' and 'undoing's' in relation to the researcher's identity that are the focus of this section. Immersion in a strange setting inherently involves 'personal, emotional and identity work' and 'with the momentum of fieldwork, and our desire to be part of the field, the self can be lost, found, altered and recast' (Coffey, 1999, p. 35). Furthermore in reflective accounts, the field self is mentioned in 'tangential and semi-detached ways', with a lack of consideration to the identity work that surrounds the field experience (Coffey, 1999, p. 2). My contribution in this reading is empirical, providing an in-depth ethnographic account that highlights how, in search of a researchers identity, I joined a SAR organization that allowed me to create and also perhaps rescue a version of myself that was fit for purpose. The chapter concludes with a summary of these separate readings and how they contribute to the overall thesis.

## **8.2 Volunteer identities: Altruism, atonement and extreme volunteering**

### **8.2.1. Introduction**

This first reading focuses on the volunteering literature and considers how members of QuakeRescue constructed themselves as volunteers. Dominant definitions of volunteering suggest that 'to volunteer is to choose to act in recognition of a need with an attitude of social responsibility and without concern for monetary profit' (Ellis & Noyes, 1990, p. 4) but such conceptualisations fail to recognise the self-interests of individuals and the other ways in which people may profit from their volunteering experiences. It is important to attempt to theorise the experiences of QuakeRescue's members, not only because there is a dearth of qualitative studies around volunteering in general, but also because of the distinctiveness of this kind of volunteering from other types, i.e. a level of commitment and risk unlike most

other forms of voluntary work, and a lack of studies that consider both danger and volunteering (with exception, Lois, 1999, O'Toole & Grey, 2016). Therefore, the main focus of this reading is on the data in chapter five around the meaning of volunteering, and in chapter seven concerning the damage and disillusionment that may result from this type of volunteer work.

Drawing on the title of Nagel's (1970) book, '*The possibility of altruism*', section 8.2.2 explores altruism in the context of this study and challenges the dominant perspective of volunteering as altruistic (Clary et al., 1998; Rochester, Paine, Howlett, & Zimmeck, 2016). Extant research has been concerned with pro-social behaviours, considers altruism as a key value that has a significant impact on volunteering and that volunteers should not disproportionately benefit from their volunteering experience (Rochester et al., 2016). However, these perspectives privilege altruism at the expense of a richer understanding of volunteering. Section 8.2.3, '*Atoning for sins*' explores how members in QuakeRescue associated atonement and guilt with their participation in volunteering. In general terms, atonement may be described as a form of compensation for wrongdoing. Although it is conceptualised in theology as the reconciliation of God and mankind through Christ, there is an absence of empirical studies on how atonement is experienced and enacted by individuals in society, and how this may be linked to their identities and identity work. Finally, section 8.2.4 '*Total volunteering*', is concerned with how this extreme form of volunteer work became a 'way of being' for some members of QuakeRescue. It also challenges the dominant view of volunteering as enhancing the well-being of the donor.

### **8.2.2 The possibility of altruism**

The term 'altruism', first coined by Comte (1875) was intended as a moral concept. In the broadest sense it has been described as 'promoting the interest of the other' (Scott & Seglow, 2007, p. 1) or a selfless concern for the welfare of others, in response to perceived social expectations (Hill, 1984). The notion that volunteering is driven by altruism persists because surveys have repeatedly found this is what volunteers say, although blood donors admitted to 'a feeling of self-satisfaction' despite stating altruistic reasons for their donation as well as '... a desire for self-sacrifice and a strong need for recognition and prestige' (Piliavin & Callero, 1991, p. 56). In QuakeRescue many of the participants did not provide what might be viewed

as a socially acceptable answer, that their volunteering was for the benefit of others, but described it mainly as being for their own advantage.

Altruism is 'any behaviour motivated merely by the belief that someone will benefit or avoid harm by it' (Nagel, 1970, p. 16). Although the participants' provided a narrative of joining with the intention of being able to help others in the future, their volunteering was largely instrumental, driven by self-centred concerns that involved working on themselves in a variety of ways, where helping others was arguably secondary to searching and rescuing themselves. That said, over the course of the IRT training programme, selfless commitment and concern for team members became fundamentally important, in a kind of inter-group altruism. Nevertheless, self-centred interests lingered with the benefits they gained from the training itself, and concern for the charity's beneficiaries remained incidental.

Altruism, it is argued, comprises three elements; an intention to help another, an act that is initiated by the helper voluntarily, and performed without expectation of reward (Bierhoff, 1987). QuakeRescue members who deployed to an earthquake had undertaken potentially costly and 'sacrificial' altruistic acts, and had voluntarily risked their lives for the benefit of another. However, those who had performed such rescues described the intrinsic reward they had felt from doing so, that it had made them 'feel good' about themselves, a kind of 'symbolic recognition' or return for the donor that renders 'pure' altruism doubtful or 'gift-giving' impossible (Hoffman, 1981; Derrida, 1992). Indeed, one volunteer's (#46) continued acquaintance with a boy he had helped to rescue many years earlier, was an ongoing source of gratification. Another characteristic of helping is the 'act of giving anonymously...The donor will neither see the benefits of the gift, nor in many cases be seen by others to have made the donation' (Radley & Kennedy, 1995, p. 687). Yet, live rescues were widely publicised and sometimes televised and whilst the volunteers often did not actively seek it, this often brought recognition, praise and considerable prestige. Genuine altruism involves a 'metaphysics of agency' whereby altruists desire to be the 'source of concrete improvement to others lives and not just observers of them' (Scott & Seglow, 2007, p. 97) and this is perhaps demonstrated in what members of QuakeRescue termed 'the art of the possible', a belief in their own agency, that they could make rescues in the most challenging and extreme circumstances.

Nevertheless, according to some commentators, altruism has its limits and should only be insofar as one is able and does not extend to putting oneself in danger

(Wolff, 1720, in Scott & Seglow, 2007), although this seems contradictory given that a selfless concern for others is the central tenet of altruism. This presents an interesting paradox for SAR, as although the volunteers learn the skills and techniques to make them capable of rescue work, they undoubtedly put themselves at considerable physical and psychological risk. The second interview with Sam Sparkes suggested that such sacrificial altruism was too much and caused him long-term harm. The question of whether QuakeRescue asked too much of their volunteers, and how much altruism they could or should reasonably expect, is pertinent here. Sam's account suggested that in achieving the organization's altruistic aims, QuakeRescue appeared to fail to protect the interests of their members. Yet, in engaging in SAR work, the members are voluntarily agreeing to potentially put themselves at risk for the benefit of a stranger, but they are volunteers and as such have freedom to choose otherwise. That said, such supererogation i.e. going beyond moral duty or obligation, and 'noble self sacrifice', whilst not a requirement for altruism (Nagel, 1970), was highly desired by the IRT members and central to the volunteer identities to which they aspired. Then again, 'almost everyone wants to be an altruist' (Scott & Seglow, 2007, p. 1) not least because it provides a resource for attempting to secure oneself as a 'moral' or good person. Despite being driven mainly by selfish concerns, the volunteers wished to present themselves as altruists, and belonging to the QuakeRescue team provided a 'double communal purpose', both the camaraderie of collaborative work and also 'defining the relationship of the individual to society at large' through the 'visibility of the activity' (Radley & Kennedy, 1997, p. 693).

Altruism, like identity, was not fixed or static but a nuanced blend of self-concern and helping others, which fluctuated over the course of the participant's membership in QuakeRescue. Individuals oscillated on a continuum of altruism that, at any given time, ranged from self-concern and little interest for others, to sacrificial altruism where concern for the other was put before self (Monroe, 1996; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991). What appeared as instrumental became more altruistic but the reverse was also observed. For Sam Sparkes, his willingness for 'sacrificial' altruism was tainted by his traumatic experiences. His heightened self-concern shifted the focus of his altruism, from disaster casualties to his team mates and particularly their preparedness for missions. Sam's departure from QuakeRescue was instrumental as his concern for the team and others became secondary to saving himself from further damage and distress. This suggests that altruism does indeed have its limits and that selfless concern for others may only



extend so far. Arguably, the participants concern for themselves, rather than others, manifested itself in other ways, such as a need to absolve themselves of guilt and a desire to have an extreme experience of volunteering.

### **8.2.3 Atoning for sins**

This section explores atonement, a theme that many of the participants alluded to when describing volunteering as a form of reparation for experiences in both their working and personal lives. In broad terms, atonement may be described as making amends for a wrong. QuakeRescue members described volunteering not only as a means to atone for events in their pasts, but also as a way of sustaining their present day lives and securing their future selves.

Several ex-military volunteers spoke of their guilt regarding what they perceived as failures whilst on active duty, and were seeking absolution from those traumatic events or 'atoning for sins'. Volunteering was a means of easing their consciences, as 'guilt may be an important component of many exchanges' in gift-giving (Schwartz, 1967, p. 11). Other participants described SAR work as a form of repayment for perceived misdemeanours or events in their past which they said left a lingering desire or sense of obligation to reciprocate. Volunteering for difficult, dangerous SAR work was a form of penance and self-sacrifice in order to redeem for past misdemeanours, as 'an important latent function of sacrifice is the provision of atonement for unseen deviations' (Schwartz, 1967 p. 11). In addition to making amends for the past, volunteers also desired atonement for their present privileged lives, for '*selling their souls*' for what they considered to be highly paid but meaningless jobs in the city. This was particularly so for the ex-military members, who described an existential anxiety that they were no longer 'making a difference', in contrast to the time that they had served in the Armed Forces. Volunteering then, provided a form of virtuous or moral recompense, not dissimilar to that of philanthropists who make monetary donations as a means of 'freeing the self from the guilt caused by possession of inordinate wealth' (Maclean et al, 2015, p. 1631).

The volunteer's perceived wrong-doings or 'unseen deviations' inclined them to engage in 'technologies of the self' and work on themselves from the 'inside out' through their SAR work (Foucault 1988). Atonement, fuelled by guilt and their anxieties was an integral element of the participant's identity concerns, an 'ongoing quest' to be ethical in what came to resemble, in Foucauldian terms, a 'care of the

self project' (Kornberger & Brown, 2007, p. 513). Volunteering enabled them to refine and revise their versions of self and to 'define themselves as "moral" beings' (Clarke et al, 2009, p. 328) and thus provided a 'redemption narrative of self-renewal' (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Yet, in QuakeRescue volunteering was not just concerned with absolving the self from the guilt of the past or the present, but was also a 'deferred self-interested investment' (Maclean et al, 2015, p. 1627) and a means of protecting their future selves. Participant #5 described helping others as a means of accumulating 'tokens in the jar' for when he got to Heaven, so SAR work provided an investment for his future (after-life) or a 'quid for a more implicit and conjectured quo' (Phelps, 1975, p. 2). Life stories constructed on temporal frameworks 'describe the actual past, actual present, and potential future' (Obodaru, 2012, p. 48), and atoning for past events was fundamental to the temporal coherence of the volunteer's narratives as well as their future possible, ideal or ought selves (Albert, 1977; Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Temporality was both an integral element of their narratives (Costas & Grey, 2014; Ricoeur, 1991), as well as a significant element in the 'absolving of self' identity work of the volunteers.

The need to present oneself as altruistic and the desire to atone for their past and present lives, as well as securing their future selves, attracted individuals to QuakeRescue, which offered the opportunity to attempt to save themselves through an extreme form of volunteering.

#### **8.2.4. 'Extreme' volunteering**

The term 'extreme' may be used to describe events, actions, organizations or cultures that are remarkable for being extraordinary, risky, thrilling or fascinating, however it is socially constructed, context specific and widely contested (Lois, 2004; Granter, McCann & Boyle, 2015). Participants described their volunteering as 'work', although it was not paid, but shared many of the characteristics of extreme jobs, such as commitment and extreme physical or emotional demands that allowed them to claim a 'badge of honour' for undertaking such work (Hewlett & Luce, 2006).

'Edgework' is conceptualised as 'activities that ... involve a clearly observable threat to one's physical or mental well-being or ones sense of ordered existence. The archetypal edgework experience is one in which the individual's failure to meet the

challenge at hand will result in death, or at the very least, debilitating injury' (Lyng, 1990, p.857). 'Workplace edgework' provides employees with the opportunity to engage in edgework in typically hyper-masculinised work settings e.g. police, fire, military, steelworkers etc. Many of QuakeRescue's members were, or had been, engaged in these occupations, although individuals from other occupational backgrounds were also attracted to SAR work. Whilst, there were some similarities to workplace edgework, such as voluntary risk-taking, it was not done entirely for its own sake, as there was an aspiration to help or rescue others at some point in the future. SAR also differs from high-risk sporting activities in that there were rules of conduct and understood boundaries that typically meant it was more 'in control' than 'out of control'. That said, there was always the potential for a rescue situation to spiral out of control, e.g. in the event of an aftershock, and the possibility for death or serious injury regardless of efforts to mitigate risk.

Search and rescue in QuakeRescue was also comparable to 'thick' volunteering (O'Toole & Grey, 2016), not only because of the risky nature or quality of the work, but the deep meaning it held for the participants. Furthermore, the commitment and 'intensity' of volunteering effort (Rodell, 2013) made it a way of life or a way of being, so that it was a form of 'high-stakes' volunteering (McNamee & Peterson, 2016). Then again, conceptualising SAR as 'edgework', 'thick' or 'high-stakes' volunteering is reductionist, as it minimises or obscures the complexities of this form of volunteering.

In QuakeRescue, participants were socialised into this intense voluntary work in which extremity was normalised through training processes and discourses of preparedness and resilience, whereby the extreme was to be expected and controlled so that 'the extreme is thus a site where human agency reasserts itself' (Valentine et al, 2012, p. 1015). The challenge of extreme volunteering provided both an 'aspirational' identity (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) and a self project (Giddens, 1991) that individuals employed in social situations to elevate themselves above others and bolster their self-value and worth. Extreme volunteering also made available discourses of heroism and altruism, which propped and sustained them in their presentations to others, and enabled them to construct themselves as virtuous. Such extreme volunteer identities were constructed in practice through organizational selection and training processes. There were various 'rites de passage' that began at the recruitment stage, and continued throughout the extensive two year training programme and final assessment. Similar to a 'total

institution', QuakeRescue maintained a panoptic surveillance of volunteers' performance and a concentrated control that extended to when and where candidates could sleep or eat (Goffman, 1961; Foucault, 1980). That said, this control only extended as far as the participants were at QuakeRescue, as they were able to choose to remain or leave. Furthermore, complete dedication to the team and commitment to the training programme necessitated a form of self denial whereby members set aside their own interests in favour of the group, which in turn maintained the centrality of the volunteer identity at QuakeRescue.

Volunteers will place themselves in danger for a cause to which they feel strongly connected and committed (for example O'Toole & Grey, 2015). However, the intensity of effort and prolonged high level commitment was detrimental to Sam Sparkes, almost at the cost of his personal relationships and to the extent that he 'burnt out'. Multiple deployments to earthquakes had the potential to result in long term psychological trauma and emotional damage. In contrast to the dominant view of volunteering as promoting well-being, a number of survey based studies have shown that extreme volunteers experience 'burnout, secondary trauma, stress and despair' (Haski-Leveanthal & Meijs, 2011, p. 30), a decrease in well-being as a result from work-life and time conflicts (Cowlshaw et al, 2008, 2010) or post-traumatic stress disorder and burn-out (Bartley, 2007; Britton, 1991). The interviews with Sam highlighted how he had not only conformed to various forms of cultural control in QuakeRescue but had, like many of the other participants, engaged in self-disciplining techniques in his endeavour to achieve his desired extreme volunteer identity. Nevertheless, QuakeRescue was a voluntary organization and at any time members had the capacity to resist or withdraw and were, to varying degrees, 'willing slaves' who associated extreme volunteering with prestige rather than subjugation (Bunting, 2004).

### **8.2.5 Summary**

The purpose of this first reading has been to highlight the complexity of volunteer identities in QuakeRescue. SAR work perhaps conferred an identity on the participants as altruistic and heroic, but self-interests, a need for atonement and an aspiration for extreme volunteering were significant elements in the constructions of themselves as volunteers. Altruism, like identity, is not fixed but a continuum along which the volunteers oscillated, depending on their training and deployment experiences. Temporality was a key factor in the atonement narratives of the

volunteers, not only in relation to their need to fix past misdemeanours and present privileges but also in securing their future selves. SAR volunteering was more nuanced than ‘thick’ volunteering, extreme work or edgework, but a blend of some of these characteristics, with the added complexity of intense technologies of self by the volunteers, embedded within a ‘total institution’ form of control exercised by QuakeRescue.

This reading adds to the literature on volunteering both theoretically and empirically. My primary contribution is in developing the thesis that in volunteering to train to rescue others, individuals, particularly those who never actually deploy, are engaged in a search for meaning and processes of rescuing themselves. A secondary contribution is in providing a distinctive in-depth case study of the identities of voluntary workers who undertake risky and dangerous activities.

### **8.3 Masculine identities: Volunteering to be a hero**

#### **8.3.1 Introduction**

This second reading focuses on masculine identities and how members of QuakeRescue deployed dominant hegemonic discourses and engaged in stereotypical masculine practices in their attempts to construct themselves as rescuers. The focus is on how the enactment of masculine practices in QuakeRescue was a complex blend of physicality, knowledge, skills, experience and personal qualities, and the ways in which this version of masculinity was sustained through hegemonic, homosocial practices and organizational processes. Individual members endeavoured to achieve this idealised identity by employing a variety of discourses or engaging in dramaturgical performances. This reading is important because ‘how masculinities are performed is an under researched area in organization studies’ (Coupland, 2015, p. 15), and conceptualisations of masculinity have tended to focus on the enactment of masculinities through bodywork (Connell, 1995). My main contribution in this reading is that individuals, mostly men but also some women, volunteered in a rescue organization to ‘search’ for and perhaps ‘rescue’ a version of themselves as masculine.

Section 8.3.2, ‘*Zero to Hero*’ examines the identity work of the volunteers and how this was bound up with anxieties of being an imposter and in comparing themselves

to others. It also considers how idealised notions of a SAR worker were underpinned by typical masculine discourses of danger and heroism, as well as how a hierarchical masculinity based on degrees of physical size, strength, technical rescue knowledge and experience was problematic for many of the male, as well as female volunteers. Section 8.3.3, '*Masculine identities in practice*' considers how this version of masculinity was enacted in practice and was linked to organizational processes such as recruitment, training and performance assessments. The ways in which hegemonic masculinity was sustained through patriarchy and the complicity of the men is also explored. Finally, section 8.3.4 '*Toxic masculinity and damaged identities*', centres on hegemonic masculine practices and discourses that facilitated a denial of risk and a disinclination to talk about traumatic rescue experiences. It also focuses on how these toxic practices resulted in a damaged volunteer identity for one participant, and the ways in which his complete conformity became resistance, and dominant masculine discourses were substituted with narratives of selfishness and naivety.

### **8.3.2. Zero to Hero**

Belonging to QuakeRescue and training to become a SAR provided individuals with the discursive resources to save themselves from what they described as their meaningless jobs and the routine of their daily lives. In constructing themselves as SAR volunteers they drew on multiple discourses containing references to fictional superheroes, trust and commitment. These discourses facilitated stories of personal transformation and provided an opportunity to 'define themselves as moral beings' (Clarke et al, 2009, p. 328) and re-author preferred versions of themselves (Polkinghorne, 1988). These narratives were interwoven with elements from their past and present that were 'real or imagined' (Czarniawska, 1999) as well as 'wishful fantasies' or dreams of danger and being a hero in the future (Gabriel, 2008).

In an attempt to resolve many overlapping insecurities, including being an 'imposter', being the 'other' or comparing themselves to others, the volunteers engaged in complex and extensive identity work. Through various 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988), volunteers worked on their bodies as well as their knowledge, skills and abilities in a quest to prove themselves as a SAR volunteer. Whilst some volunteers' worked on their strength and fitness to improve their physical performance and as a means of demonstrating 'disciplined bodies' (Frank,

1990), others endeavoured to become equipment or technical experts, for example in confined spaces or SWAH. Although this was not a formal requirement, it was indicative of their anxiety to justify their place and contribution to the team. Another form of identity work involved the use of physical images and symbols to contribute to their SAR identities, for example, several trainees spent thousands of pounds on specialist clothing and equipment, such as safety helmets and respirators, to UAV's for their personal use. Whilst these volunteers were jokingly called 'kit whores' or as having 'kit fetishes', such symbols facilitated a 'dramaturgical performance' that demonstrated their seriousness about training, commitment to the team, and readiness to deploy (Goffman, 1959). However, impression management was an on-going endeavour, not least through regular attendance at monthly training weekends, in order to be seen to be maintaining one's competency in USAR skills and preparedness to deploy. Failure to do so, it was considered, would diminish the likelihood of being selected for a mission by the senior team.

Whilst proving oneself throughout the selection, training and final assessment provided individuals with opportunities to construct themselves as SAR volunteers to external audiences, it did not provide the ultimate validation of being a rescuer, either to themselves or other members of the team. Indeed, the idealised SAR volunteer identity involved deploying to an earthquake or disaster zone and gaining mission experience and 'ground truth', similar to soldiers actually being deployed in a war zone and seeing combat. This represented another 'probationary crucible' (Jackall, 1988), which only a small number of QuakeRescue members achieved, and for the majority this experience was not realised and as such the 'idealised' identity remained highly desirable but elusive. Billy Blazes represented the exemplary model of masculinity and the idealised SAR volunteer identity that the other volunteers aspired to (Thornborrow & Brown 2009), in particular, his experience of numerous deployments and live rescues, personification of the work-hard/ play-hard ethic, as well as his personal values and leadership. As such Billy was the embodiment of the organization, and although he was physically strong, several other team members were of considerably larger physique than Billy, which suggests that physicality was not central to the idealised volunteer identity, despite remaining a significant source of insecurity for many.

Another source of identity work stemmed from the hierarchical masculinity that operated within QuakeRescue. In addition to the dominance of the male volunteers over the females, there was also an internal hegemony (Connell, 1995) where the

males from ex-military and emergency services backgrounds achieved ascendancy over the men from other occupations. This supremacy was bound up in the superior knowledge, skills and experience of the dominant males in emergency situations, and necessitated additional endeavour for the sub-ordinated males to ascend the hierarchy, by enhancing physicality and skills, or by deploying on a mission as the final test or proof of self as a rescuer. That said, even within the dominant group there were hierarchies of those who had more recent deployment experience than others, or injured ex-military volunteers whose identity concerns focused on the performance of their bodies and not letting the team down.

Dominant discourses and organizational processes of selection, training, assessment and deployment, acted to both prop and shore as well as undermine individual's SAR identities. Embedded homosocial practices served to further bolster some, or cause anxiety for other volunteers. These discourses, processes and practices were significant in the enactment of masculine identities within QuakeRescue.

### **8.3.3. Masculine identities in practice**

Cornwall and Lindisfarne argue, 'there is no single thing that is masculinity' (1994, p198), and for the volunteers in QuakeRescue, masculinity was a complex inter-relation of physicality and strength, technical SAR knowledge, heroic live rescues at disaster zones, and personal resilience. These characteristics represented an idealised version of a SAR volunteer and a hegemonic masculinity that consisted of multiple overlapping layers, and only corresponded to a small number of men, i.e. the few with mission experience (Carrigan et al, 1985). The majority of the men experienced this masculinity to varying degrees, which were problematic to transcend, especially for those from non-emergency services or military backgrounds.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest it is important to consider not only the male perspective but also the ways in which the female volunteers experienced masculinity. For the women, the layers were more nuanced and complex, for example, although the females were not expected to be as physically strong as the males and it was generally accepted that they would use the heavier breaking tools for shorter periods of time and might 'swap out' more frequently on stretcher carries, there was still a need to prove technical competency, SAR knowledge and personal



resilience. In addition, their femininity was emphasised in many ways, for example, there was a lack of suitable clothing for females, with boots and overalls available only in men's sizes, although this is not unheard of in studies of women in male dominated environments (e.g. Ainsworth et al, 2014). These were cumbersome and caused numerous practical difficulties, not least by having to undress to go to the toilet, often in training locations with no facilities and where there was limited screening and therefore a lack of privacy. This was not problematic for the men, because the overalls had a two-way zip especially designed for this purpose. Furthermore, the final 'test' i.e. mission experience was considerably more difficult for the women to achieve than the males. In the previous two missions to Haiti and Nepal, no women were selected to be part of the deployment team, an indication perhaps of the patriarchal dominance enacted through the leadership of Jack Hammer and Billy Blazes. This was further highlighted by the fact that there was only one remaining female in QuakeRescue who had previously deployed to a disaster.

The hegemonic model was entrenched and sustained through organizational processes such as selection, training and assessment. This was not only problematic for the females but for the men who also felt the patriarchal 'gaze' of the other males (Coupland, 2015). This was especially so for trainees who were subject to the panoptic surveillance of others on every aspect of their performance (Foucault, 1980). The complicity of the men was sustained by persuasive discourses of trust, commitment and heroism, through which the management team articulated an idealised subject position that privileged QuakeRescue's interests (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). The individual's desire to emulate or gain the approval of Billy, their ultimate role model, was also significant in the men's docility (Musson & Duberley, 2007). Nevertheless, there were one or two men who distanced themselves from the hegemonic model and frequently challenged why there was a lack of females in the team. Such protests were usually dismissed through humour about whether they were concerned about the 'quantity' rather than 'quality' of women, or excuses that it was difficult to find women of the 'right' calibre.

Hegemonic practices were not only sustained by the complicity of the men, but through patriarchal dominance. The all-male team selected by Billy and Jack to deploy to the Nepal earthquake, consisted of themselves, several longstanding volunteers and only three males with no previous mission experience. Carefully restricting the deployed team not only maintained their patriarchal dominance and

sustained their own status as the most experienced, but also acted as a gate-keeping device regarding who was admitted into the inner circle of those with mission experience, although this is not untypical of similar settings (e.g. Lois, 1999). Several of the IRT team, particularly those who had volunteered but were not chosen to deploy, were unhappy with the lack of transparency in this process, questioned the inclusion of some team members over themselves, and were angry that they had not received feedback as to why they had been unsuccessful. Nevertheless, any murmurings of dissent were quickly closed down, as both Billy and Jack refused to discuss the rationale for, or to justify their decisions.

Yet, this dominant version of masculinity was also fraught with contradictions. Jack and Billy seemed to be aware of the dangers of uniformity and lack of diversity, and spoke of the need to recruit more females and a more diverse group of men. Ironically, embedded homosocial practices such as drinking games and physical strength challenges, marginalised the majority of women and some of the males, making it difficult for them to fit in to this pre-existing masculine frame (Pacholok, 2009). QuakeRescue's strongly held values included not discriminating against others on any grounds, yet organizational processes such as recruitment and training, cultural norms and heteronormative white male dominance, achieved exactly that. However, the level of hegemonic masculinity was often downplayed 'front stage' (Goffman, 1959), particularly when it was to QuakeRescue's advantage to do so, for example, ensuring females were present at public events or in promotional material. At other times, they celebrated and encouraged their dominant masculinity, for example, a male volunteer brought his new girlfriend to a drinks reception following a public QuakeRescue event and reportedly received a round of applause from the other men for her beauty, a gesture that pleased him greatly and that he mentioned frequently. However, many of the volunteers grappled with the tensions of these complex and multiple masculinities, and for some of the men this became toxic and damaging.

#### **8.3.4. Toxic masculinity and damaged identities**

The term 'toxic' maybe be described as something which acts or has the effect of poison, causes unpleasant feelings, or is harmful or malicious in some way. Toxic masculinity is defined as '...the constellation of socially male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence' (Kupers, 2005, p. 714). However, this is contested with some scholars arguing that it is a variety of harmful practices rather than fixed character types, or an

'assemblage of toxic traits', which can affect the lives of men as well as women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 854).

In QuakeRescue, hegemonic and hierarchical masculine practices encouraged a toxicity, not only in relation to 'others' who were subordinated, but more specifically in relation to the volunteer's attitudes to risk and concomitant disinclination to speak openly about their traumatic disaster experiences. Although the volunteers said they were aware that an earthquake would be a challenging environment, the arguably highly masculinised culture stifled a lack of acknowledgement, discussion and treatment of the emotional damage, as well as a blasé attitude, or denial, about risk in general. Indeed, risk was a significant element of the illusion of the idealised SAR identity. Missions to earthquakes were often several years apart and many of the volunteers were unlikely to ever deploy and be placed in a situation of 'real' risk. In spite of this, notions of danger and heroism underpinned their aspirational identities and were important discursive resources in their presentations to others, despite their claims to the contrary protesting that they preferred to down play the attention (Goffman, 1959). Dominant discourses of complete trust in the team, and strong faith in the leadership of Jack and Billy seemed to obscure their view of the potential risks and damage they may experience.

Deploying on a mission was highly desired and considered the ultimate test of volunteers as capable SAR technicians and resilient, strong individuals. However, volunteers who had mission experience did not tell macho tales of heroism, but rather quiet, wistful stories of the people they had helped and those they had left behind (see also O'Toole & Grey, 2016). Witnessing human tragedy on such an enormous scale evoked a degree of humility, which those who had not deployed seemed to lack. Furthermore, the IRT members had perhaps oversubscribed to the idealised fantasy of the SAR worker, the discourse of the 'art of the possible' and the team's limitless potential (Ekman, 2013). Mission experiences shattered illusions of heroism and adventure, and in rescuing others arguably they lost themselves. Rather than securing themselves as competent SAR workers, they returned from missions with more insecurities about the meaning of their volunteering and doubts about the organization's purpose.

The idealised SAR identity to which they had aspired was tainted by their mission experiences, which resulted in an undesirable and conflicted volunteer identity that they struggled to resolve. Indeed responding to an earthquake was the source of

significant struggle about what it meant in practice to be a volunteer, including displaced relationships and detachment, disillusionment for SAR and QuakeRescue, as well as identity conflicts that required intensive remedial work. For example, personal narratives based on these intense experiences were incomprehensible to most others and resulted in an identity 'dilemma' for the participants that often caused them to be isolated in social settings (Collinson, 2003; Giddens, 1991). In particular, Sam Sparkes challenged the organization's strategic direction and was concerned for the effectiveness of training of new recruits, but fundamentally he no longer wished to respond to a disaster or be involved in a rescue in the future. Ground truth brought new insight, that SAR volunteering was neither heroic nor altruistic, but rather it was a self-defeating idealised identity. Indeed, the elements of SAR that he had once aspired to were no longer attractive or desired.

Despite the close friendships and camaraderie that he gained from belonging to QuakeRescue, Sam redefined and endeavoured to take back control for himself (Gabriel, 1999). Through a capacity to 'act otherwise' (Giddens, 1979) Sam criticised and rejected the dominant discourses associated with QuakeRescue and finally 'resisted' by resigning from the institution and SAR volunteering. Sam's identity work centred on 'discursive manoeuvres' through which he distanced himself from the organization and SAR (Iedema et al, 2004). Highly masculinised discourses of selfless, heroic rescues were replaced by blame, guilt and selfishness, as Sam blamed himself for his naivety and QuakeRescue for a lack of preparation for missions. Rather than viewing himself as selfless, he constructed his SAR volunteering as selfish, and said that he felt guilty that he had been prepared to risk his life for others, rather than devote himself to his family. In a complete reversal, Sam's earlier reported altruistic commitment to the team and others was replaced an overwhelming concern for himself. However, his departure from QuakeRescue left a void that he said he was anxious to fill and a need to attempt to save himself once again.

My key contribution to the literature on masculinity is in providing an empirical example of how individuals, mostly men but also some women, volunteered in a rescue organization to 'search', maintain, promote and perhaps 'rescue' a version of themselves as 'masculine' This was most notable for those with 'failed' or previous military backgrounds or those who were not sufficiently bolstered by their current professional identities.

### 8.3.5 Summary

This reading highlights the precariousness and fluidity of identities in practice and the complex endeavour of identity work. Hierarchical masculinities and maleness by degree were problematic for many of the men, as well as the women in the group. Such masculinities were sustained by dominant discourses of physicality, heroism and mission experience, as well as hegemonic masculine practices, which were seldom challenged by the subordinated men. These multiple overlapping masculinities required nuanced identity work, often in the form of 'projects of self'. Hegemonic discourses and practices including a disinclination to speak of traumatic missions, panoptic surveillance of performance and an enduring requirement to prove oneself by deploying to an earthquake were damaging for some individuals. Although gaining mission experience meant the realisation of their aspiration to be a hero, the ground truth was undesired, in some cases damaged their emotional well-being and the meaning that volunteering held for them.

## 8.4 Ethnographers reading: Too close for comfort?

### 8.4.1. Introduction

This final reading is concerned with the eight vignettes embedded in this thesis, which are important because they not only provide a snapshot of my experiences with QuakeRescue over the last four years, but also render my own identity struggles visible, as well as the methodological and practical challenges and some unexpected consequences of the fieldwork. Their inclusion is an effort to engage in an 'explicitly reflexive' dialogue with the reader (Humphreys, 2005, p. 852), rather than as a means to claim better research (Pillow, 2003). The vignettes from chapter five, '*My worst nightmare*' (5.1) and '*Passing selection*' (5.2) highlight some of the realities of ethnographic fieldwork and the challenges of undertaking research with a fully immersed experience. In chapter six, '*One of the boys?*' (6.1) focuses on an occasion when I felt part of the team, whereas '*The imposter*', (6.2) and '*The weakest link*', (6.3) illuminate some of my identity work, how I felt isolated, compared myself to others and struggled for credibility as a SAR volunteer. The vignettes in chapter seven, '*QuakeRescue as a way of life*' (7.1), '*The gentleman doth protest too much*' (7.2) and '*My own ground truth*' (7.3) emphasise some of the research concerns around data collection, and some of the doubts I felt about the

SAR work itself. A ninth vignette, *'In the void'*, which encapsulates my struggles and emotions, has also been added in this chapter<sup>20</sup>.

My primary contribution in this reading is empirical, providing an in-depth example of the 'edgy business' of 'enactive' ethnography (Spencer, 2009; Wacquant, 2015), which highlights how as a student in search of an ethnographers identity, I joined a SAR organization that allowed me to create and also perhaps rescue a version of myself that was fit for purpose.

#### **8.4.2. Losing myself... or finding myself?**

Ethnographers have written of many potential challenges facing the fieldworker including '... the amount of nervous energy and emotional resilience to be able to work for long hours in the field' (Watson, 2011, p. 204) to issues of embodiment (Frank, 1990), gender (Golde, 1970), relationships in the field (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013) and the emotions of the researcher (Brannan, 2014). If '...ethnographic sympathy and empathy comes from the experience of taking close to the same shit others take day-in and day-out', how does the fully immersed researcher '...come to terms with the situational dictates and pressures put on, expressed, and presumably felt by those studied?' (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 220).

Furthermore, the ethnographer does not arrive at the research site tabula rasa or without an identity, but together with '...disciplinary knowledge and theoretical frameworks....we also bring a self which is, among other things, gendered, sexual, occupational, generational – located in time and space' (Coffey, 1999, p. 158). Whilst in the field, the researcher's self is not temporarily suspended, therefore reflecting on the impact of the fieldwork on the construction, maintenance, tensions and negotiations on identity, and the research itself, is a vital aspect of the ethnographic analysis and writing process.

Before entering the field I had not given much thought to how the fieldwork might change and challenge my sense of self. My main concern had been for the methodological and practical aspects of the research work itself, however, the many enriching and challenging personal experiences brought an awareness to the fieldwork that I would have not otherwise have considered (Corbetta, 2003). On a

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<sup>20</sup> It is not usual to present new data in the Discussion, but I have done so as the additional vignette captures the methodological and practical challenges I faced whilst completing the research.

positive note I gained considerable technical knowledge about hydrology, earthquakes and collapsed structures, as well as practical skills involving the use of technical search equipment, heavy duty gear and hand tools. Undoubtedly the completion of gruelling and demanding training tasks increased my personal resilience and enhanced my self-confidence, although at the time evoked many insecurities (vignette 5.1). Nevertheless, there were many private struggles as I endeavoured to the 'aspirational' identities (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) of a search and rescue volunteer as well as a 'real' academic (Harding, Ford, & Gough, 2010).

In a study about identity, the question 'Who am I?' soon became my own as I grappled with multiple and often conflicting field selves, being a professional researcher whilst concurrently attempting to integrate into the team as a competent search and rescue volunteer (e.g. vignette 5.2). This is by no means a novel experience since 'ethnographers study others in order to find out more about themselves' (Rosen, 1991, p. 2) and research involves working on our selves in ways that may be 'both productive and problematic' (Coffey, 1999, p. 14). However, I experienced my fieldwork as particularly onerous as I sought to be accepted and competent in multiple contexts and in various ways.

Doubt about one's competency, of being an 'imposter' or a 'struggle for credibility' when entering a new social arena requires ongoing identity work, since any attempts to secure the self are ultimately unachievable (Knights & Clarke, 2014). Successive gruelling monthly training weekends increased self doubts about my competency as a SAR volunteer and did little to reduce my sense of feeling like an 'imposter'. Although often overlooked, the researcher is not without a body. In my case I am a relatively petite<sup>21</sup>, quietly spoken female, in contrast to the majority of the team, who were, from my perspective, physically imposing alpha males. A persistent anxiety revolved around the level of my performance despite the fact that I was completing all the training tasks alongside the other team members, many of whom were ex-military and current emergency services personnel (vignette 6.2). I often did not understand the highly militarised and SAR terminology and feared that as a 'civilian' I was not considered a serious participant by some of the other trainees. As I arrived at the first post-selection training weekend, one trainee directly asked me '*did **everyone** pass then?*' instantly making me doubt my place on the

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<sup>21</sup> Height 5'3", weight 48kgs.

team (vignette 6.2). Had I deliberately been ‘passed’ by the assessors out of a sense of obligation because they had got to know me from my observational visits and were keen for me to complete the research? I shared my concerns with one of the instructors who was categorical in his reassurance, ‘*you earned your place like everyone else*’, but despite this I frequently doubted my ability and whether I really belonged in the team (vignette 5.2). In contrast to the tendency in organization studies to portray research as an ‘individual endeavour’, this highlights and acknowledges both the presence and the influence of the members in the organization being researched (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015).

I worked on my perceived shortcomings in an attempt to present myself as a competent and credible search and rescue trainee. For example, I completed an indoor climbing course to overcome my fear of heights and learn belaying skills<sup>22</sup>, routinely practised rescue knots and worked out regularly at the gym to improve my stamina, strength and fitness. I also attempted to conform and blend in, not only by wearing the same rescue worker kit, such as overalls and steel toe-capped boots but by careful ‘impression management’ techniques (Goffman, 1959). For example, I was careful not to wear any make-up, jewellery or nail varnish, possibly in recognition of the gendered context of the fieldwork.

Being a physically small female, from a non-military or emergency services background was often challenging in this male dominated setting. I experienced frequent ‘awkward’ moments (Donnelly, Gabriel, Özkazanç-Pan, Koning, & Ooi, 2013) not least because of the stifling proximity and the lack of physical or personal privacy within which we trained. Through many forms of ‘bodywork’ I endeavoured to portray a ‘disciplined’ and controlled body (Frank, 1990). When training I deliberately did not display, or admit to, being physically fatigued, for example, never asking to slowdown the pace of a ‘yomp’<sup>23</sup> or to swap sides when my arm muscles were burning with effort on stretcher carries, again reproducing rather than challenging the gendered norms. In hindsight it seems absurd that I was judging myself against the physicality and strength of the male team members, but undoubtedly I was, although this is not unheard of amongst other females or researchers in similar settings (for example Lois, 1999). Unwittingly I was reproducing masculine and gendered norms about physical strength, competition

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<sup>22</sup> Belaying refers to a variety of techniques a climbing partner uses to exert tension on a rope so that the climber does not fall very far.

<sup>23</sup> Royal Marines slang describing a long-distance march carrying full kit.



and aggression and enacting the masculine practices that were followed by the other members. Yet in contrast to my own insecurity about lack of physicality and strength, my size was considered a benefit by the other team members. I was reassured that there were '*enough big blokes who can smash holes in things*' and that my size would allow me to fit through small holes and into voids when others could not, therefore potentially reducing the time taken to reach a trapped casualty.

By contrast, being the 'other' in research can also bring benefits (Clarke & Knights, 2014), and I suspect that some of the male participants spoke more openly in their interviews, not just because we were talking on a one-to-one basis, and perhaps not because I was female, but because I was an outsider. Many participants confided that they had a fear of heights or confined spaces and revealed feelings of guilt and selfishness for leaving their wives and children in order to attend training weekends. These were topics rarely revealed or discussed in front of this highly masculinised group and I was surprised, and relieved, to hear that these feelings were not exclusive to me.

Identity work in the research setting included impression management (Goffman, 1959) and bodywork (Frank, 1990), which centred on anxieties about the search and rescue activities rather than the research. In the literature, reflexivity is concerned with the researcher's assumptions or biases about the study itself, rather than the multiple, varied ways that the self may be affected by the fieldwork. This privileges a discrete 'researcher self' but 'selves' cannot be 'separated' out but are inextricably interwoven and as such necessitate a holistic approach to analysis and reflection (Watson, 2009). There is also a tendency in the literature to focus on the negative aspects of fieldwork and, as the vignettes demonstrate, there were plenty of challenging moments. Nevertheless, there were many positive and pleasant times when I triumphed over some of my fears, mastered key technical search skills, and enjoyed the camaraderie of belonging in this close-knit team (vignette 6.1). Of course, this again suggests that I was enacting masculine norms and behaviours, and perhaps was also narcissistically preoccupied with myself (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008).

To return to the earlier dilemma – what was my identity 'quest' in the field? Why undertake the search and rescue training when I could have easily remained as my researcher 'self' and chosen to observe and interview instead? Certainly I was endeavouring to find my own unique research 'signature' in order to distinguish my

PhD study (Humphreys et al., 2003). My 'extreme' ethnography and deep immersion has attracted the attention of some of my peers, who have described it as 'sexy' ethnography and how they have felt 'ethnographic envy'. By contrast, from a personal perspective, completing the SAR training has been a form of 'self exile' (Van Maanen, 1988) that provided an escape from home, work and life responsibilities. Although physically challenging, the breaking and breaching of an immovable object could be incredibly cathartic and occasionally I lost myself in the meaning and purpose of the task '...in each moment of its course' (Watts, 1951, p. 116).

Undoubtedly there was an element of self-validation, the need to be both a competent and professional researcher but also a desire to prove to myself, and to others, that I could be resilient and effective in difficult situations, that I could challenge myself and conquer some of my demons in the process. In many ways SAR training was empowering, perhaps because it offered an opportunity to break free from the gendered stereotypes, such as being well-presented, well-behaved and putting the needs of others before my own, which I have conformed to for all of my life. Attempting to do so in this particular male-dominated setting is self-defeating, given the patriarchal dominance and masculine norms, unless I endeavoured to enact their particular version of masculinity and behave like 'one of the boys' (Vignette 6.1)

That said, had I not participated in the training, I doubt whether I would have truly appreciated the volunteer experience and perspective. If I had simply watched from the bank rather than 'dive into the stream of action to the greatest possible depth', I would not have had the 'flesh and blood' experiences that provided an embodied practical knowledge of both visible and invisible elements of the research site (Wacquant, 2015, p. 3). Reflecting on these embodied experiences has facilitated a multi-coloured and multi-dimensional account of the organization and its members that is written from a 'vulnerable observer' perspective rather than 'writing vulnerably' (Wacquant, 2015).

### 8.4.3. In the void: Methodological and practical risks of fieldwork

#### Vignette 8.1 'In the void'

##### 11 January 2015: Confined space search and rescue exercise

*I'm filled with dread but after some persuasion from the instructors, I lie flat on my stomach, place my head to one side, and squeeze my way through a tiny 'letterbox' opening at the entrance of the 'collapsed' building. I find myself in a low narrow tunnel and crawl carefully through a series of dog-leg turns and twists, sharp declines and various obstacles that require the flexibility of a contortionist to negotiate. There is a 'casualty' trapped somewhere up ahead so I must push on as quickly as I can. The void is getting narrower and narrower until once again I'm fully prone and the only way to make progress is by a commando style crawl, pushing my elbows and feet into the ground in order to haul myself along. I wish I had taken off some of the layers of clothing under my overalls, as I'm now hot and short of breath with the exertion of making my way through the dark, airless passageway. The roof is now so low my head cannot fit upright and I have to turn it onto one side and press my cheek into the floor. My helmet torch is focused on the side wall so apart from a small circle of light, the remainder of the tunnel is pitch black, and I can't see what's ahead. The darkness unnerves and overwhelms me and my heart begins pounding erratically. This is my worst fear, my claustrophobic nightmare. Arms outstretched in front of me in the dark, I feel the way ahead is blocked by debris that is too heavy for me to push and there's no room to move it past me and out of the way. I'm stuck. I just want to get out. Deep breath, need to keep the panic down, fight the tears. Perhaps one of the team is close by? I call out, hoping to hear a familiar voice, some reassurance that I'm not alone in this tiny void. Silence. Panic gets the better of me and I've got to get out. No space to turn around, the only way out is back the way I came. Still lying on my stomach, cheek pressed against the cold ground, I frantically wriggle backwards through the maze of the collapsed 'building' and towards daylight.*

Vignette 8.1 demonstrates an occasion when the fieldwork pushed me physically, emotionally and psychologically to the limit, but of course this is 'real' ethnography, 'living with and living like those who are studied' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 49). On reflection, this sense of suffocation was not limited to the physical or practical aspects of being in the field but also an anxiety from a research perspective. Effective ethnographic fieldwork is vital if the researcher is to convince their audience that they have 'been there' (Geertz, 1988, p. 12). I had no previous connections to this group, to search and rescue work or volunteering and as such was not translating a 'home' culture for an audience of 'others' (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Good relations with key organizational members were established early on and rapport built with team members by observing and participating in a Support Member role. In doing so, I got 'to know them' and 'how things work'. In establishing and developing social relationships with several members of the team through

monthly training sessions, I was no longer just 'that researcher from the university up the road' (Watson, 2011, pp. 203-204).

My position of 'stranger' (Agar, 1986) was a temporary state that quickly transitioned after I passed 'selection' in March 2014 and was invited to complete full operational training. This was a significant 'rite of passage' after which I was no longer identified by the group as an 'observer' but instead a team member. I commenced the two year IRT training programme as part of the exclusive cohort of trainees and for one weekend a month we completed a series of search and rescue training exercises, shared meals and slept alongside one another and quite quickly my status changed to that of 'complete membership' (Adler & Adler, 1987).

With membership came the methodological risk of over familiarity. Completing the search and rescue training in a team deliberately founded on closeness and a 'culture of friendships' (Costas, 2012), I quickly developed a genuine affection for many of the team members and formed friendships outside of the research site. It became increasingly difficult to criticise them, almost akin to a betrayal or letting the team down and I experienced a sense of being engulfed by the organization, almost 'going native' (Gold, 1958). Maintaining a critical distance also became increasingly difficult. In the void I had felt confined and alone, but there were times as I attempted to complete the fieldwork that I experienced a similar sensation of being stifled within this organization, and felt a need (methodologically) to resurface. During a supervisory meeting, I felt a suspicion that I was getting too close as I realised that I had shifted from describing the group as 'they' - to 'we' - and when challenged by my supervisor I switched back again to 'they'. A few days after the emotional struggle 'in the void', I became aware that I did not want to do the search and rescue training anymore. In a moment of clarity, I realised with horror that in many ways I had been too close for comfort. My main interest had become completing the SAR training programme rather than concern for the fieldwork and I had lost sight of my primary aim – doing the research. I was caught in a bind in that I needed to be fully immersed in the organization in order to do 'real' ethnography, but was unwilling and unable to leave the field until the data was collected.

Another methodological challenge arose as I became more embedded in the organization and began to juggle the simultaneous, often conflicting tasks of both researcher and group member. To begin with I had gone about my research work

without too much difficulty, observing, note-taking and helping in a support capacity, however as my participation in QuakeRescue increased I grappled with the complex tensions between the research setting and my fieldworker self. In hindsight this problem was exacerbated when the other volunteers began to perceive me as a team member and the research element of my involvement was almost forgotten. On several occasions training instructors asked me when the research would be finished because they were keen for me to recommence full participation on the training programme. Whilst complete membership was fruitful for the fieldwork because I was able to 'capture the nuances and meaning of each participants' life from the participant's point of view' (Janesick, 2000, p. 384), there were several weekends when I returned home in despair at having only managed to complete two or three interviews between training activities.

One conflict that I found particularly problematic was documenting action at the expense of an 'embodied phenomenological experience' (Anderson, 2006). The fieldwork was physically exhausting due to the nature and structure of the training activities that took place from 10pm Friday through until midday Sunday with 4-6 hours sleep in total. Full participation in the training resulted in a struggle to recall events in sufficient detail and chronological order when I returned home, mainly caused by sleep deprivation. To overcome this, I occasionally used the 'down time' between training exercises to compile scratch notes rather than sleep, but the resulting exhaustion made further participation in the training, or the writing of coherent field notes, incredibly difficult. Although there is a tendency to privilege the intellectualised over the embodied, my research was a 'flesh and blood' experience as I sometimes found myself struggling to stay awake at the wheel of my car on the drive home, my head pounding from lack of sleep (Wacquant, 2015). The physical effects of the training often continued for several days afterwards, with severe bruising from crawling in partly demolished buildings, aching muscles from carrying casualty-laden stretchers and sleep deprivation. However, I often experienced ambivalence during the many months when I both dreaded the fieldwork, with its concomitant and intense 'hangover' but was unwilling to miss an opportunity to collect data. Arguably I was perhaps concerned about my credibility with the team, remained attached to the masculine expectations of the group and did not want to 'wimp out'.

#### **8.4.4 Unexpected consequences**

As Hammersley and Atkinson argue, 'field researchers do not always leave the field physically and emotionally unscathed, and they rarely leave unaffected by the experience' (1995, p. 120), however, the extent and ways in which I was affected were unexpected. Methodologically, I got too close for comfort, and based on my reading of the literature, my major concern was that this would be detrimental for my data collection. However, I was able to resurface by temporarily withdrawing from the search and rescue training programme, conducting a preliminary thematic analysis of a small number of the interview transcripts as well as having a critical conversation with one of my academic supervisors. On a practical level, the persistent conflict of demands were unforeseen, as I attempted to be constantly alert for research possibilities and afraid of missing key research moments whilst fully participating as a member.

How a researcher identity may be constructed, challenged or transformed during the fieldwork process receives negligible attention (LeCompte, Tesch, & Goetz, 1993), although some scholars have acknowledged that there may be identity struggles and tensions (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Kondo 1990; Wengle, 2005). In retrospect, my identity work was more intense and complex than anticipated. In a 'collision of worlds' (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015, p. 71) my fieldwork self became '...meaningful beyond the temporal and spatial specificities of the field' (Coffey, 1999, p.28), as I attempted to secure myself both as a competent researcher and a credible search and rescue volunteer.

Ethnography '...works best when it surprises us' (Humphreys et al., 2003, p. 19), and there have been many 'surprises and undoing's' during the process of this research (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027). Firstly, I naively thought that separating myself from the research would be unproblematic. When embarking on the study, little did I realise that I too was searching and indeed attempting to rescue myself from patriarchal dominance, and my own (unconscious) reproduction of gendered stereotypes that have constrained me for most of my life. Secondly, completing the PhD and the SAR training has brought with it a realisation that I am much more resilient than I ever thought. Learning to overcome my fear in the field setting has reduced self doubts outside of it, and has become a measure for my ability to overcome challenging situations, for example, when faced with presenting my research to an academic audience, I remind myself that I am able to abseil from

a 55ft tower. Of course, this suggests that I too may have been seduced by the notion of 'limitless potential' (Ekman, 2013). Finally, another unexpected aspect of the fieldwork has been the strength of the relationships I developed with the participants. In search and rescue teams strong friendships, almost familial bonds, quickly grow as you frequently train, eat and sleep in close proximity. In spite of the cliché, I really would trust them with my life, an indication of the depth of the attachment the volunteers feel for their team members (vignette 7.3), as well as the power of organizational ethnography.

#### **8.4.5 Summary**

This reading has outlined some of the conflicts experienced during my ethnographic fieldwork and how, as the vignettes of my research experiences illustrate, (auto)ethnographic methods can be a 'two-edged sword' (Karra & Phillips, 2008, p. 556). It has also highlighted that deep immersion does not necessarily undermine the value of the fieldwork and despite temporarily losing myself, the subsequent resurfacing brought about a sharpening of focus and critical approach to the data. Furthermore, it explores how as a student in search of an ethnographers identity, I joined a SAR organization that allowed me to create and also perhaps rescue a version of myself that was fit for purpose. In doing so, I have made an empirical contribution in exploring both the conflictual nature of the fieldwork process, including some of the practical and methodological challenges, as well as the identity work that emerged in response to these conflicts.

#### **8.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have constructed three readings that best represent the data presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I have focused my attention on the meanings individuals attach to this extreme form of volunteering, masculine identities in a male-dominated setting, as well as the methodological and practical challenges in my ethnographic fieldwork. The first section considered volunteering, in particular the meanings that individuals attach to their voluntary work. The reading also explored how issues of altruism, atonement and extreme work were implicated in the aspirational and idealised identities of the volunteers. High levels of commitment or 'obsessive devotion' (Wacquant, 1995, p. 507) were also explored and found to be detrimental to volunteer identities. My contribution to the volunteering literature is

twofold; firstly in developing the thesis that individuals who volunteer to train to rescue other people are engaged in processes of rescuing themselves and secondly in providing a distinctive in-depth case study of the identities and identity work of volunteers who participate in risky and extreme voluntary work.

The second section explored the dominant discourses that were central in the participants' constructions of themselves as SAR volunteers. Masculinity was a key theme, which was problematic and toxic for many of the males as they compared themselves to others and aspired to an unachievable idealised volunteer identity. A toxic masculinity necessitated individuals to remain in control of their feelings (Kerfoot, 1999; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993) and meant that traumatic mission experiences were not acknowledged or discussed openly. Furthermore, participants were male aspirants who wished to tell 'a heroic coming of age tale' (Brown & Coupland, 2015, p. 1328) that involved a denial of risk in order to portray themselves as 'the epitome of maleness' (Haas, 1974). My contribution to the masculinity literature is in providing an empirical study of individuals, who volunteered in a rescue organization to 'search', maintain, promote and perhaps 'rescue' a version of themselves as 'masculine'.

The third reading explored the methodological and practical issues my ethnographic fieldwork through an analysis of the vignettes embedded within this thesis. Researcher reflexivity was a key element of this section, and the vignettes provided insights into my own experiences, which sometimes echoed and sometimes were in complete contrast to those of the participants. My main contribution in this reading has been how as a student in search of an ethnographers identity, I joined a SAR organization that allowed me to create and also perhaps rescue a version of myself that was fit for purpose. In doing so, I have made an empirical contribution in exposing both the conflictual nature of the fieldwork process, including some of the practical and methodological challenges, as well as the identity work that emerged in response to these conflicts.

Finally, there were other readings that I could have constructed with this research, for example, issues of power and control (Foucault, 1980, 1988) and embodiment (Frank 1990) emerged in the transcripts. However, from the outset the work was conceived to explore how individuals subjectively construe themselves as search and rescue volunteers through discourse, and the discourses that were most dominant in the data were those centred on masculinities and the meaning of



volunteering. In developing the readings, I made the choices I did based on where I felt most able to make an original contribution to knowledge, i.e. the literatures on ethnography, masculine identities, and volunteers, which after all is the aim of a PhD.

The next and final chapter contains a summary of the work and some concluding comments, as well as outlining some of the limitations of study and potential directions for future research.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

### **9.1 Introduction**

This final chapter draws together the key themes of this thesis and presents my concluding remarks. First, I provide a summary of the findings of each chapter, before revisiting the theoretical and methodological contributions of the research in relation to the body of knowledge on volunteering, identities and identity work, as well as the advantages of an ethnographic approach. This is followed by a review of the limitations of the study and suggested avenues for future research. I have ended on a personal note with some final words and reflections on my experiences during this study.

### **9.2 Summary of findings**

The literature review examined the main concepts of identity and identity work, outlining the key traditions and setting out the major arguments in the extant literature. The role of power in relation to discourse and identity was considered with particular focus on the nuanced and dynamic ways in which agentic individuals manoeuvre between discourses in different social contexts. A discursive approach was appropriate to study the complexities of identity construction and identity work of individuals, and was central to my empirical research as it enabled an in-depth study of how participants articulated their roles through story-telling and employed multiple, intersecting and antagonistic discourses. The review also considered masculine identities, with a focus on the ways in which hegemonic masculinities may subordinate and marginalise some men, as well as women. In order to provide context for the study, a brief overview of the literature on volunteering was also included.

The methodology chapter situated my research within the epistemological and methodological debates in organizational studies and documented the rationale behind the specific research design and data analysis in this study. The objective of my research was to understand the meanings and provide an insight into which elements of being a volunteer were important and valuable to individual members of QuakeRescue. In adopting a qualitative approach, there were a range of methods available and choices to make to ensure 'the research question is matched with strategy' (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 40). This interpretive study used an ethnographic framework to focus on the socially constructed nature of identities in

seeking to describe and understand the meanings individuals attach to their volunteer roles. Ethnography enabled a close and relatively prolonged relationship (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and allowed for multiple methods including participant observation, semi-structured and informal interviews, as well as the examination of texts and documents. It was therefore appropriate to draw upon an interpretivist inductive framework and employ a social constructivist lens.

The case organization, QuakeRescue, is a voluntary humanitarian organization that provides global emergency search and rescue services in the event of earthquake and other sudden onset natural disasters. Chapter 4 outlined a brief history of QuakeRescue, along with its structure, values and the commitment required of its members. Details of the individual volunteer teams and key events over the period of the study were also included.

Chapter 5 presented the different meanings that the participants attached to being a SAR volunteer, in particular their search for meaning and purpose. Volunteering offered an opportunity to work on themselves in various ways including physical and personal resilience and acquiring new skills, which provided resources that enabled them to rescue themselves from less desirable versions. The first reading explored these findings in relation to the volunteering literature, and contrary to the dominant view on volunteering as an altruistic activity for the benefit of others (Rochester et al, 2009), this study finds that participants engagement in volunteering was instrumental, more for their own benefit rather than that of charity recipients and appeared to have little to do with altruism. This extreme form of volunteering provided a 'badge of honour' (Hewlett & Luce, 2006) that members deployed in a form of self-aggrandisement and to elevate themselves above others, and the idealised volunteer identity was highly desired so that participants were 'willing slaves' who were concerned with prestige rather than subjugation (Bunting, 2004). Furthermore, volunteering provided a means of atoning for sins, such as reconciling past events, making recompense for perceived wrongdoings or freeing themselves from guilt. However, volunteering was not only concerned with past and present selves, but was also an attempt to secure their future selves in a kind of 'deferred self-interested investment' (Maclean et al, 2015, p. 1627).

In chapter 6, volunteer identities were propped and shored by a variety of masculine discourses such as heroism and camaraderie, as well as elitism and trust. Organizational processes of recruitment, training and assessment also served to

build and maintain the volunteers identities as search and rescuers, embedded within discourses offering the 'art of the possible' and the team's belief in their 'limitless potential' (Ekman, 2013). That said, there were many challenges and tensions which evoked anxieties that resulted in identity work for some volunteers. These concerns centred on fitting into the highly masculinised team and comparisons to others. The second reading discussed this data in relation to the literature on masculinity with specific focus on how nuanced versions of masculinity were enacted by 'degree' within QuakeRescue and how this could be both problematic and toxic for the volunteers (Coupland, 2015; Ainsworth et al, 2014; Kupers, 2005), with both men and women experiencing the direct gaze of the patriarchal males within the team (Coupland, 2015). That said, contrary to Ainsworth et al (2014), the stereotypical masculine ideal was far from under threat in QuakeRescue, as many of the participants were unintentionally searching for and attempting to construct a version of themselves as masculine. This was particularly the case for the ex-military and the emergency services personnel who, perhaps, were no longer sufficiently buoyed by their professional identities.

Chapter 7 illustrated narcissistic preoccupations with self and the self-defeating nature of identity work. Dominant discourses of elitism and trust were broken and breached in part by structural and strategic organizational changes. These organizational processes, along with the traumatic 'ground truth' of a mission, were significant factors in undermining the tenability of their volunteer identities. The precarious nature of identity was highlighted through the participants stories of deploying to a disaster, which rather than securing them as volunteers caused an identity 'dilemma' (Collinson, 2003; Giddens, 1991), which for some transformed their life perspective and views of others, or for others shattered their illusion of the idealised heroic SAR volunteer.

Chapter 8 discussed the data in the context of the literature review and methodology, through three readings; a volunteering reading, '*Altruism, atonement and extreme volunteering*', a masculine identities reading, '*Volunteering to be a Hero*' and an ethnographic reading, '*Too close for comfort*'. The first reading considered volunteering, in particular the meanings that individuals attach to their voluntary work. It also explored how issues of altruism, atonement and extreme work were implicated in the aspirational and idealised identities of the volunteers. The masculine identities reading explored the dominant discourses that were central in the participants' constructions of themselves as SAR volunteers. Masculinity was

a key theme, which was problematic and toxic for many of the males as they compared themselves to others and aspired to an unachievable idealised volunteer identity. The ethnographer's reading highlighted the fieldworker's dilemma of '...being on the edge of at least two worlds' (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 231) and how, like the study participants, I was endeavouring to search and rescue myself. The vignettes not only highlight some of my own identity struggles and how my 'researcher' self and 'volunteer' self could not be 'separated out' (Watson, 2009) but also the appropriateness of an ethnographic approach for this research.

### **9.3 Contribution to knowledge**

Firstly, this study provides a unique opportunity to contribute to the literature on both the voluntary sector and identity from an organization studies perspective. Little has been written about voluntary workers who undertake risky and dangerous activity, and even less about the identities of such people, particularly in organization studies.

This study adds to the body of knowledge on volunteering and identity both theoretically and empirically. My primary contribution to the scholarship is in developing the thesis that in joining an organization to train to rescue others, volunteers, and particularly those who never actually deployed, were engaged in a search for meaning in their own lives and attempting to secure or rescue themselves. The study has also shown that individuals engagement in voluntary work was not altruistic but driven by narcissistic and existential concerns, often, I have argued, by a need for atonement, a theme that has not been explored in the extant volunteering literature. This work also challenges the dominant view of volunteering as being beneficial for the physical and mental health of donors (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Musick, Herzog, & House, 1999), as some QuakeRescue volunteers suffered from post-traumatic stress and burnout on return from disaster zones.

This research provides a distinctive in-depth study of a search and rescue organization, and people engaged in a form of volunteering that is unlike many others in terms of the level of commitment that is required and the risky nature of the voluntary work. There is a dearth of qualitative studies of voluntary workers and this ethnographic account provides a rich empirical example of the identities and identity work of volunteers. By listening to volunteers, rather than surveying them,

this study has illuminated their reasons for being involved and provided insights into their volunteering experiences.

A secondary contribution of this research is to the identity literature, in providing an empirical example of how some individuals, mostly men but also some women, volunteered in QuakeRescue to 'search', maintain, promote and perhaps 'rescue' a version of themselves as 'masculine'. This was most notable for those with 'failed' or previous military backgrounds or those who were not sufficiently secured or fulfilled in their current professional identities. Furthermore, by exploring the identities and identity work of volunteers in practice, this study illustrates how identities were reproduced and reinforced by homosocial processes of recruitment, training and performance assessment.

From a methodological perspective, this study has highlighted how as a student in search of an ethnographer's identity, I joined a SAR organization that allowed me to create and also perhaps rescue a version of myself. In doing so, I have made an empirical contribution by exposing both the conflictual nature of the fieldwork process, some of the practical and methodological challenges, as well as the identity work that emerged in response to these conflicts. The fieldworker is embedded in, and connected to the field in complex and nuanced ways, and their 'researcher' and 'other' selves cannot be 'separated out' in the analysis or when writing the ethnographic account (Watson, 2009). My identity work and embodied experiences included in the vignettes embedded within this account not only provides 'contextual richness' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 83) but also 'bring life to research (and) bring research to life' (Ellis, 1998, p. 4).

#### **9.4 Limitations of the study**

Firstly, the research consists of a single case study in the UK. The distinctiveness of the setting and this particular type of volunteering may mean that the findings may not be similar in other voluntary settings, particularly those that are not male-dominated and/or engaged in risk-taking/SAR activities. Being a female researcher in a highly masculinised setting, may have made me more sensitive to the highly masculinised practices because as a female I was the 'marginalised other'. Arguably another researcher, whether male or female, with their own assumptions and anxieties would have co-created a different narrative of the interviews and constructed an alternative interpretation of the data.

In terms of the data, I was unable to interview many people who had left the organization, in part because they wanted no further contact with QuakeRescue, and unlike Sam Sparkes had not had the opportunity to get to know and trust me. These interviews would have enabled a more in-depth exploration of the tensions and challenges in this type of volunteering, the reasons why individuals abandon them as a means of securing themselves, and if like Sam, they sought alternative 'projects of self' to fill the void left by SAR work. Given the amount of rich data accumulated over three years of deep immersion, I could have chosen many different themes to develop. My vignettes and the interviews with the participants highlighted the role of emotion in this work, and this has not been followed through in the analysis. Similarly there were many more themes that were prevalent in the coding such as embodiment, power, and control, that have not been developed in this thesis.

A major strength of this study has been the ethnographic approach and my deep immersion, although this of course may have caused 'blind spots', despite my best attempts to guard against this through many critical conversations with my supervisors and much self-reflection over the course of the study. In the writing up, there has been the dilemma of how much of myself to reveal, for fear of being accused of self-absorbed narcissism (Anderson, 2006) or 'navel-gazing' (Maddison, 2006), despite being told by one supervisor that *'you don't give much of yourself away'*. However, my overall aim has been to tell the story of the volunteers before my own, and to use the vignettes to add insights and context for the reader; hopefully I have struck the 'right' balance. That said, I have achieved my aim of exploring the construction, maintenance and challenges in volunteer identities, and made an empirical and theoretical contribution.

## **9.5 Recommendations for future research**

Whilst this research has provided an in-depth case study of how participants constructed and sustained volunteer identities, and the challenges and tensions that made their voluntary work untenable, there remains the opportunity for further research of this kind, as surely such a 'widening of work's conceptual boundaries is crucial if the complexity of people's working lives, and the relationships between different forms of work and between work and social identity, are to be explored and understood' (Taylor 2004, p. 31). For example, more research using the same data set could be initiated into the links between power and control, embodiment and

emotion that emerged in chapters 5, 6 and 7. Doing so may reveal other interesting identity and identity work constructs in voluntary organizations.

Given that the research is based on a single case study in the UK, a comparative study of European and/or international voluntary teams engaged in risk taking activities, such as EVOLSAR<sup>24</sup> in Europe, Team Rubicon<sup>25</sup> in the US, could further explore the meanings attached to volunteering and how volunteer identities are constructed and maintained in similar voluntary settings. Such comparative research could also further develop understanding of the links of volunteer identities to organizational processes, as well as the dominance (or not) of masculinities in this type of voluntary work.

## **9.6 Final words**

This chapter brings to a conclusion the account of my study of QuakeRescue volunteers, including how I designed, collected and reported the research, and how I featured as the narrator. I have summarised the findings, and appraised my contribution to a body of knowledge in relation to the construction and maintenance of volunteer identities. I have also described some other areas that could have been considered, and what was left out that may have been significant, as well as suggesting some avenues for further research.

My PhD experience has been more surprising, inspiring and exhilarating than I could have ever imagined. Five years ago, undertaking a PhD, let alone becoming a qualified international search and rescue volunteer, would have been inconceivable. The fieldwork was more challenging than I expected, not least because of the personal trials and tribulations that I experienced during my deep immersion in QuakeRescue and there were undoubtedly times when it felt ‘...a bit of a mess and a mystery, but mesmerising’ (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 232). In interrogating my own endeavours, I do not doubt that I set out to attempt to secure myself as a credible doctoral researcher, but on reflection I realise that I have also been attempting to rescue myself from the masculine-inspired discourses that have constrained me for most of my life. Of course, from my reading of the literature I am only too aware

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<sup>24</sup> Evolsar – European Association of Civil Protection Volunteer Teams, founded in 2014, comprising members from Portugal, Malta, Cyprus, Spain, Italy, Greece, Hungary – and QuakeRescue in the UK.

<sup>25</sup> Team Rubicon is a large disaster response charity in the US, comprising a large proportion of military veterans. The organization’s strapline is ‘Disasters are our business. Veterans are our passion’.



that trying to secure oneself in such ways is precarious and self-defeating, but knowing this does not make researchers immune from our own insecurities and fragile identities. Indeed, as I write the final words of this thesis I remain an IRT member of QuakeRescue, and am still aspiring to an idealised identity, although not one of a masculinised heroic rescuer, but rather a capable and engaged female academic.

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## **Appendix 1: Research study overview**

### ***What is the purpose of the study?***

This research study is part of the requirements of my PhD at the School of Management, University of Bath. My study will focus on the identities of volunteers and is centred on three different but interrelated aspects. Firstly, by listening to QuakeRescue members describe their voluntary roles and experiences, I will explore why people wish to volunteer and join QuakeRescue. Secondly, what sustains members and what represents a challenge or tension in their voluntary role. Finally, it will explore the reasons which influence their decision to leave the organization.

The data collected will provide valuable information for a future recruitment, training and retention strategy, at no cost to QuakeRescue.

### ***What does the study involve?***

Over the next 12 months, I aim to conduct interviews with approx 50 Operations and Support team members, both long-term members and new recruits. The interviews can take place wherever most convenient - at HQ during a training weekend, close to your work/home or alternatively via Skype.

The interview will be informal and will focus on your experiences, role and membership in QuakeRescue. The interviews will be digitally recorded and will last approx 60 minutes. A transcript of your interview will be available on request so that you may edit or delete comments if you wish. The data will be confidential and the results anonymised so that it will not be possible for anyone to identify individual members in any publications or communications that are developed from the findings.

I will also observe and take part in training weekends, meetings, events, as well as analyzing QuakeRescue documents such as internal records, photographs, website, Facebook page etc.

### ***What will happen to the results of the research study?***

The final thesis will be submitted to the University of Bath for examination in Spring 2017. A summary research report will be provided to the QuakeRescue Management team. I intend to publish several academic journal papers or other formal publications as well as presenting the study findings at national and international research/academic conferences.

### ***What if I don't wish to take part or require further information about the study?***

Participation in the study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation without giving a reason at any time.

If you don't wish to take part, require more details or have any questions, please chat to me at any of the training weekends, or alternatively contact me by email/phone.

Thank you,

Sarah-Louise Weller

Doctoral Researcher, University of Bath

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## **Appendix 2: Interview guide**

### **Opening the interview**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this research project. Have you received the study background information? Do you have any questions that you'd like to ask from that?

The purpose of the interview is to find out how your experiences of being a QuakeRescue volunteer, so there are no right or wrong answers.

The interview will last 45- 60 minutes. It's not a problem if you'd rather not answer a particular question or if you wish to stop the interview at any time.

Do you mind if I record because you can talk much faster than I can write?

I might use some of your words in my research report but I'll do it in a way that maintains your anonymity and confidentiality.

### **Questions**

1. **Tell me how/why you joined QuakeRescue**
  - What attracted you?
  - Took a long time deliberating..?
2. **What did you learn about yourself/QuakeRescue from the selection/training/assessment process?**
  - Easy/hard? Better/worse than expected/ Surprised by
3. **Has the process/ being a QuakeRescue volunteer changed you?**
  - In what ways?
4. **How did you feel when you passed selection/got the badge?**
  - Did you expect to?
5. **What does being a QuakeRescue volunteer mean to you?**
  - What do you enjoy most?
  - What do you dislike about being a QuakeRescue volunteer?
6. **How do you balance being a QuakeRescue volunteer with the other parts of your life?**
  - What challenges/tensions does being a QuakeRescue volunteer cause or present?
  - How do you attempt to resolve these?
7. **What do others think/say about you being a QuakeRescue volunteer?**
  - Family? Friends? Work?
8. **What is your most memorable moment at QuakeRescue?**
  - Why?
9. **Would you recommend volunteering to others?**

- With QuakeRescue?

**10. Have you ever thought about leaving?**

- If so, why?
- If not...why do you think others have left/might consider leaving?

**Closing the interview**

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about being a QuakeRescue volunteer that's important to you or we haven't covered?

Would you like a copy of the interview transcript so you can check/edit/delete comments?

Thanks for your time. If you think of anything later you can always let me know by email or chat to me at a training weekend.

### Appendix 3: Research Participants

	Sex	Age	IRT/CRT/ Canine team/ Support member	Membership duration at time of interview
1	M	36	IRT	> 10 years
2	M	44	IRT trainee	< 1 year
3	M	35	IRT trainee	< 1 year
4	F	21	Canine	< 5 years
5	M	47	IRT	>5 years
6	M	37	IRT trainee	< 1 year
7	F	32	IRT	<5 years
8	M	46	Support	<5 years
9	M	30	IRT trainee	<1 year
10	F	37	Support	<1 year
11	M	33	IRT	<5 years
12	F	43	Canine	<5 years
13	M	50	Support	< 1 year
14	M	35	IRT trainee	< 1 year
15	M	38	IRT Ops Director	>10 years
16	M	45	IRT trainee	< 1 year
17	M	42	Canine	>10 yrs
18	M	47	IRT	>10 yrs
19	M	55	CRT	<1 year
20	M	43	IRT trainee	<1 year
21	M	45	IRT trainee	<1 year
22	M	54	IRT	>10 years
23	M	46	IRT	<5 years
24	M	41	IRT	>10 years
25	M	30	IRT trainee	< 5 yrs
26	M	41	IRT	< 5 yrs
27	F	45	Canine	< 5 yrs
28	F	44	Support	< 5 yrs
29	M	35	IRT	< 5 yrs
30	M	40	CRT	<1 year
31	M	38	CRT	<1 year
32	M	55	IRT trainee	< 5 yrs
33	M	47	IRT	<5 yrs
34	M	47	IRT	>10 yrs
35	F	45	Support	<5 yrs
36	M	35	IRT trainee	< 5yrs
37	M	32	IRT trainee	<5 yrs
38	F	37	IRT	>10 yrs
39	F	32	CRT	< 1yr
40	M	54	CRT	< 1yr
41	F	30	CRT	<1 yr
42	M	36	IRT trainee	< 5 yrs
43	M	60	IRT	>10 yrs
44	M	49	IRT	< 10 yrs
45	F	39	Canine	>10 yrs
46	M	35	IRT	>10 yrs
47	M	37	IRT	>5 yrs
48	M	38	IRT	<5 yrs

Interviews 1-24 conducted July – Oct 2014

Interviews 25-48 conducted April – June 2015